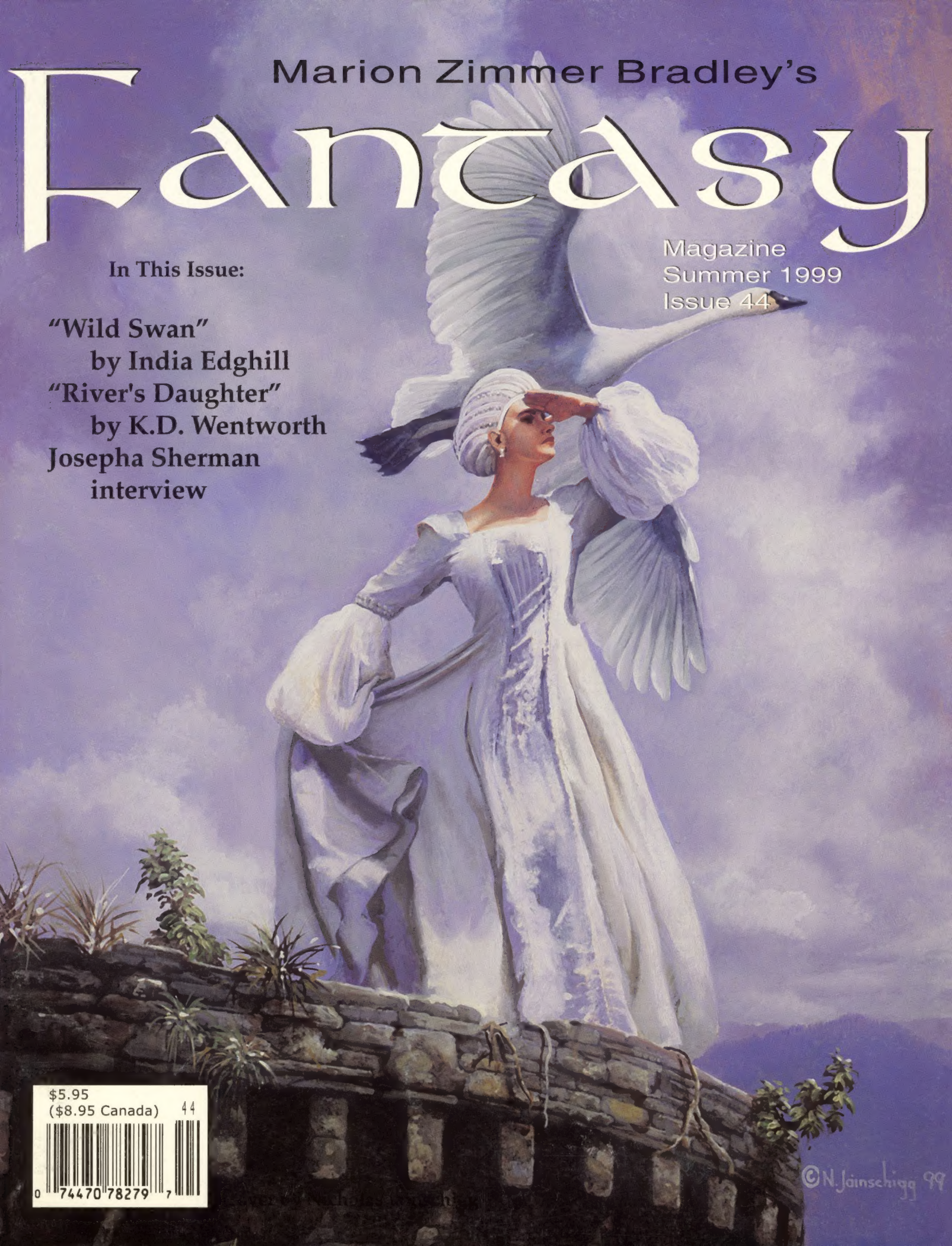
Marion Zimmer Bradley's

Fantasy

Magazine
Summer 1999
Issue 44

In This Issue:

"Wild Swan"
by India Edghill
"River's Daughter"
by K.D. Wentworth
Josepha Sherman
interview



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edited by

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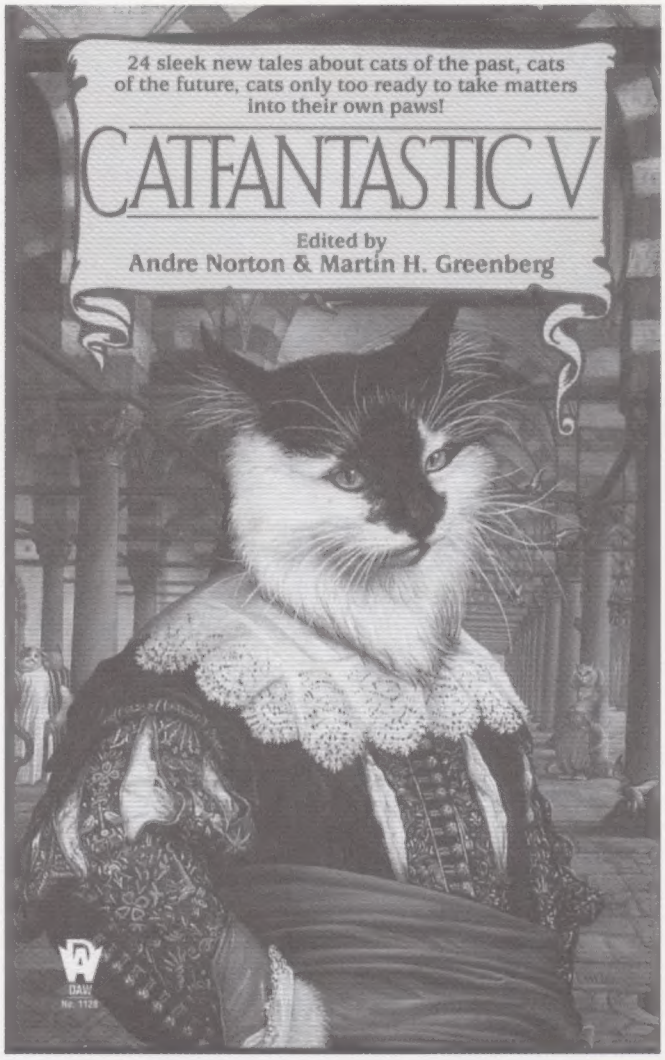
With stories by: Andre Norton, Mercedes Lackey, David Drake, Rosemary Edghill, Barry Longyear, Ardath Mayhar, Susan Shwartz, and Laura Underwood, among others.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Fifty Years in Fandom

y mother, who felt she would have liked having brothers when she was growing up, could never understand why I wanted other friends, too. "If I had brothers, I wouldn't have wanted any other friends," she'd tell me. But although I liked my two brothers well enough, I didn't make a single friend in high school. For one thing, nobody else read the books I did. The other girls preferred the Bobbsey Twins and other books which seem incredibly sexist to us now. But in a bookstore in Albany, called Lockwoods, I met other people who read sf, including Dorothy Quinn, who became my best friend for many years. Some of the people I met there put out tiny magazines, only a few inches square, just for the fun of printing them. Another fan published something called the *Saturday Evening Posthole Digger*, until the *Saturday Evening Post* made him stop.

When I was about seventeen, I went to my first convention down in New York City. I met Joe Kennedy there. Actually there were several Joe Kennedys in fandom, so we had names to distinguish them — one of them put out a magazine of bad poetry so we called him JoKe, with a capital K. He was a very nice guy, full of fun. And I met a mystery writer who called himself Larry Harris.

My friends Belle and Dorothy and I put on a small convention in Albany, and Larry came to it. There were about twelve people there, and I thought that was great. Later, my father gave me ten dollars for my birthday, and I bought a hectograph. Do you know what one is? They don't make them any more; you can get such cheap printing now. I published my first fanzine on the hectograph, called *Astra's Tower*. I sent out thirty copies of it. I was really delighted to have thirty friends to send it to! I had started making real friends in fandom.

After two and half years in fandom, my friend JoKe said he was giving it up. "After all," he said, "two and a half years is a significant portion of a lifetime." Of course, he was nineteen when he said that. I started out as a neofan and ended up as a senior citizen. Since that convention in Albany, I've been in fandom for over fifty years, far longer than JoKe's two and a half years. At least for me, the old argument of FIJAGH (fandom is just a goshdarn hobby) versus FIAWOL — fandom is a way of life — has clearly been settled.

Marion Zimmer Bradley

Sword & Sorceress XVI

edited by

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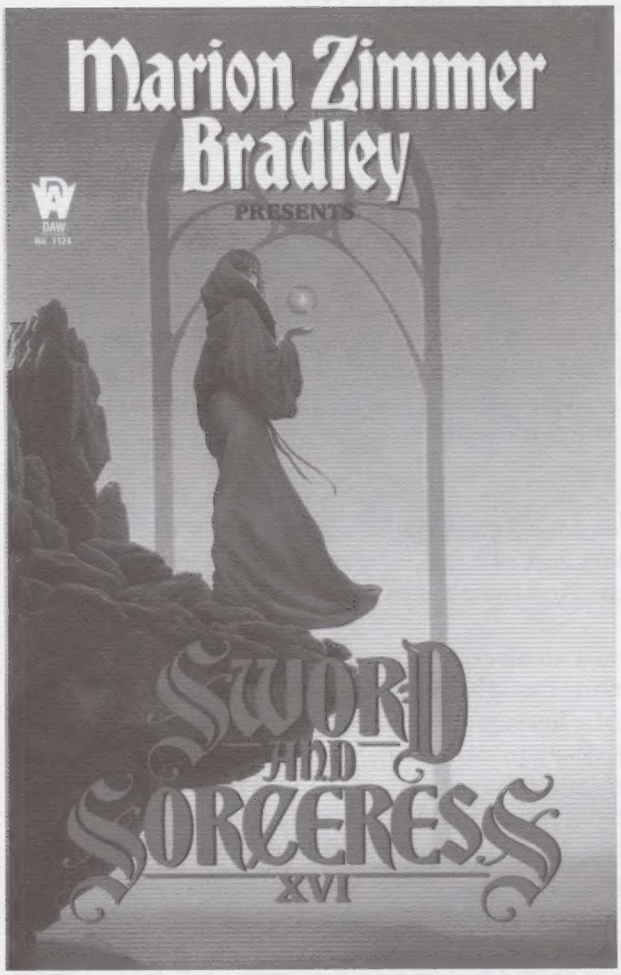

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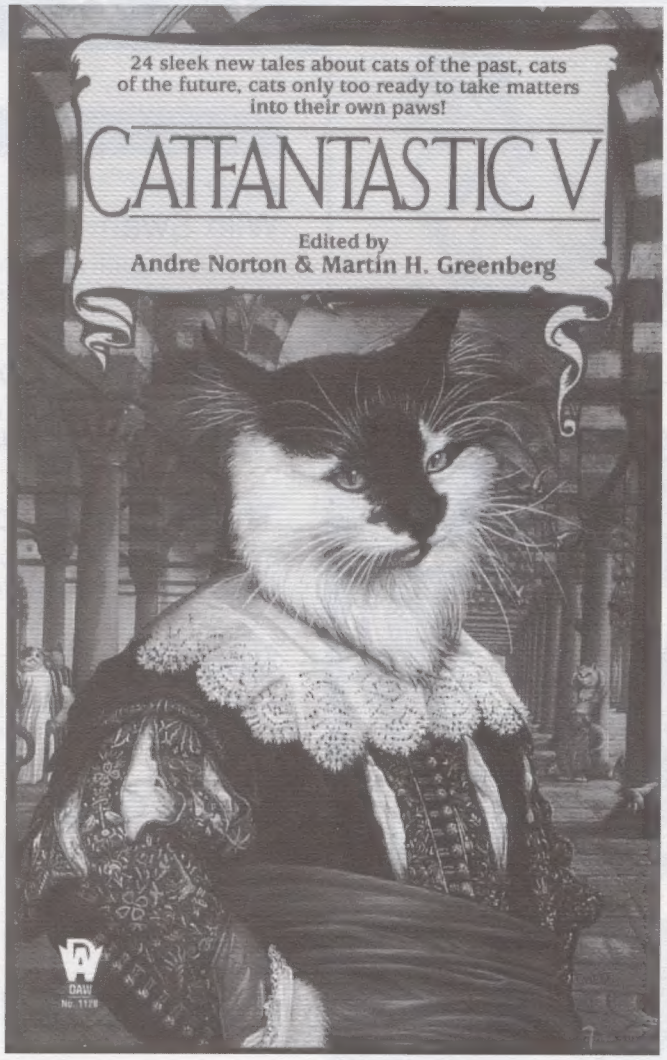
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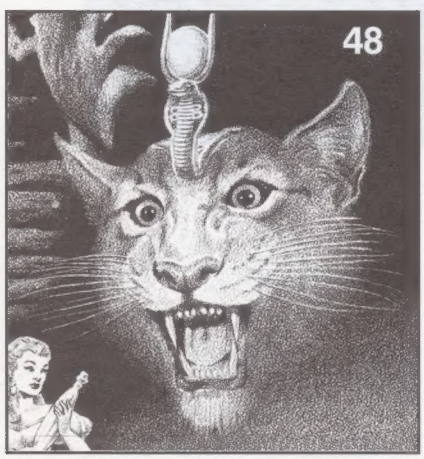
Contents



Fiction

Cover Story
Wild Swan 6
by India Edghill; art by Nicholas Jainschigg
She'd saved her brothers but wasn't yet free herself

Give a Dog a Bone 10
by Laura J. Underwood; art by James Balkovek
The persistence of terriers is legendary

The Mountains of Helvar 16
by Patricia Duffy Novak; art by K. L. Darnell
Garrin tries to solve a kidnapping

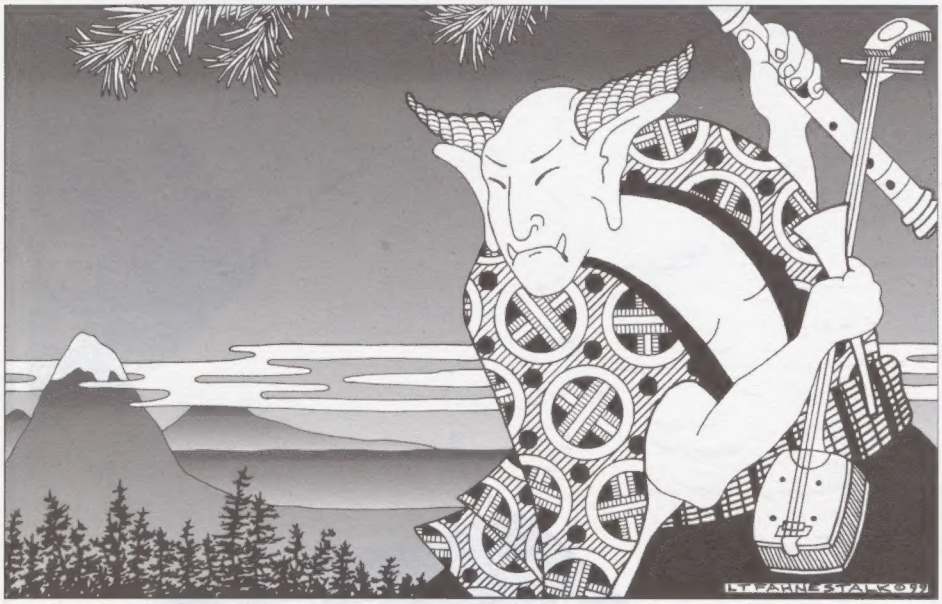
Goblin Market 23
by Marion Zimmer Bradley; art by Hannah M. G. Shapero
Lythande feels she must rescue girls lost to goblin lovers

River's Child 26
by K. D. Wentworth; art by Margaret Organ-Kean
She had to consider carefully what she would have to give up

Dear Sir 32
by Bob Maier; art by Norman Felchle
I have a dog that watches TV; can you help?

Magic of the Lost God 48
by Mary Catelli; art by George Barr
Her sister was evil and had to be stopped

The Price of Music 53
by A. E. Roberts; art by Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk
A tale of a lonely Japanese monster



Interior illustration for "The Price of Music" by Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk

Regular Features

Letters 34

An Interview with Josepha Sherman 36
by Darrell Schweitzer

Results of the Cauldron 42

Fantasy Magazine 46
Talks to Writers: Historical Fiction
by Ann Sharp

Writers Talk Back: 58
Why Bookstores Do — and Should — Exist
by Lawrence Schimel

The Last Word 62
by Rachel E. Holmen

The Cauldron: Vote for your Favorites 64

Check out the new *Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY Magazine* website at http://www.mzbfm.com

Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine

Editor	Marion Zimmer Bradley
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Secretary	Elisabeth Waters
Clerical Assistance	Margaret Davis
Proofreading	Gil Lamont
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Issue #44 • Summer1999 • Vol. 11 #4

ISSN 0897-9286

Published by:
The Marion Zimmer Bradley Living Trust, P.O. Box 249, Berkeley, California 94701, (510) 644-9222. Http://www.mzbfm.com

Submissions:
Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY Magazine* welcomes free-lance submissions from people who have read our guidelines. All submissions must be accompanied by a self-addressed envelope with adequate return postage. *FANTASY Magazine*, a quarterly, publishes original short fiction with fantasy elements in the range of 500 to 5,500 words. The most suitable length and the one most often purchased is between 3,500 and 4,000 words. While every precaution will be taken, we cannot assume liability for unsolicited manuscripts. A duplicate should be retained. Sample copies of the magazine are available for writers and artists at a special rate of $4.00 including postage and handling. Requests for WRITERS' or ARTISTS' GUIDELINES should include a #10 self-addressed stamped envelope.

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Subscriptions and back issues:
Individual subscriptions are $20.00 for 4 issues in the U.S., $27.00 in Canada, $44.00 foreign subscriptions. All subscriptions, including Canadian, are payable directly in U.S. funds only. Individual copies of the current issue are $5.95 plus shipping. Shipping charges are $1.00 per copy in U.S., $2.00 in Canada, foreign $6.00. **Back issues:** include $4.95 for each back issue (issues 33 and before). Issues 34 and newer are $5.95. Include $2.50 per order shipping in U.S.

Advertising:
Rates available on request.

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Discounts available for multiple copies of the same issue.

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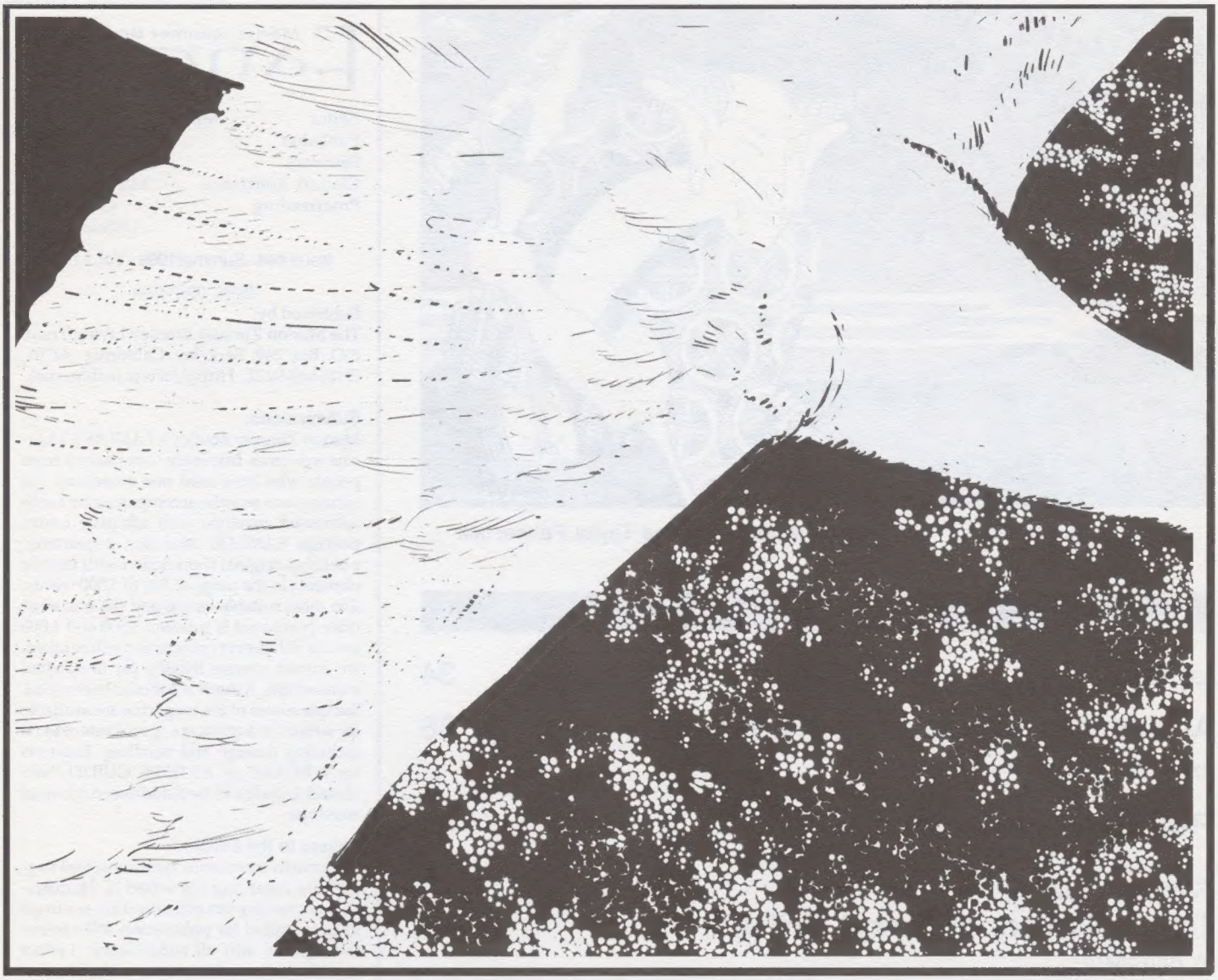
Postmaster:
Send address changes to: Marion Zimmer Bradley, P.O. Box 249, Berkeley, CA 94701-0249.



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Wild Swan

by India Edghill

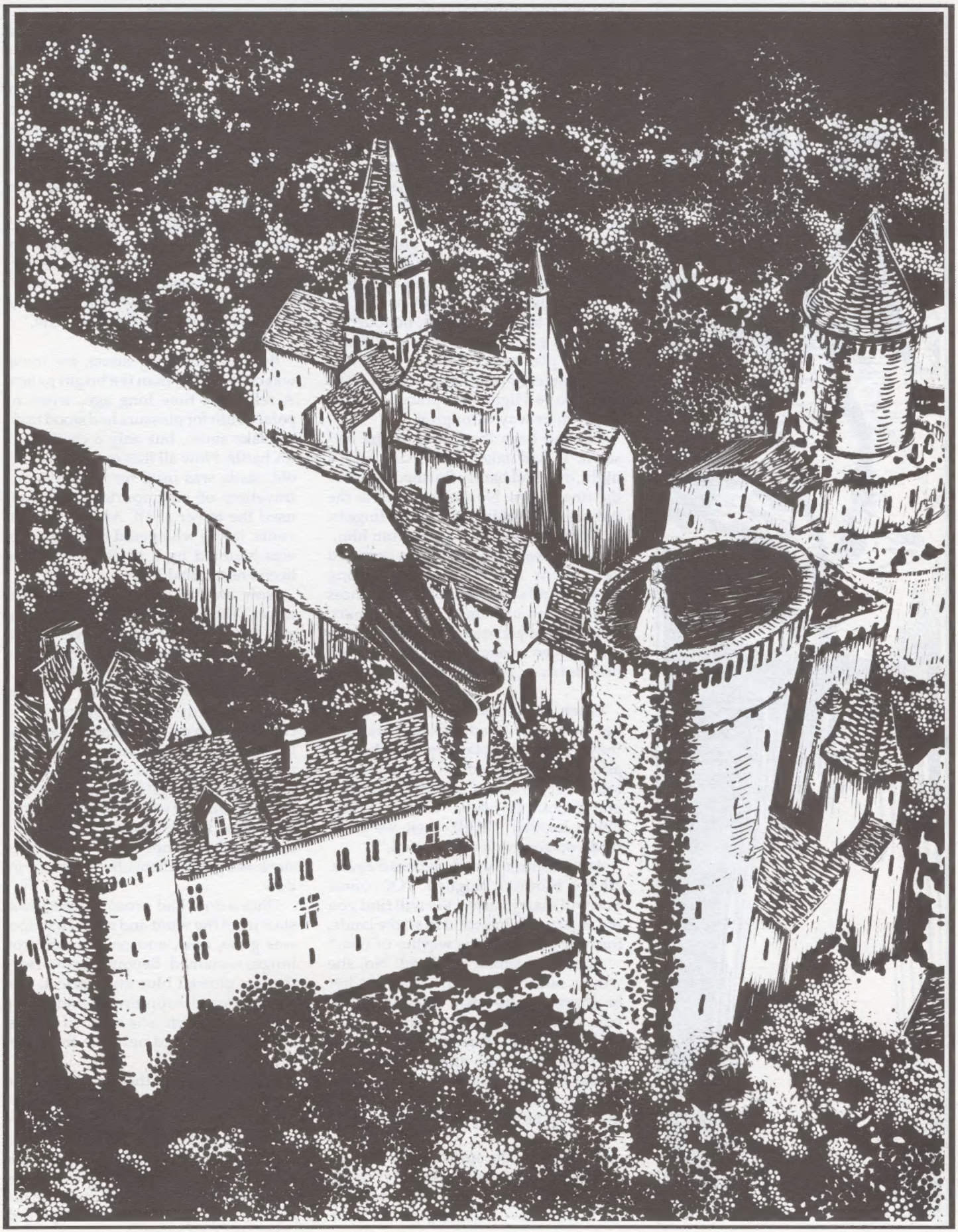
She'd sewn seven shirts to free her brothers, and it took her seven years. And when at last the princes ran unfettered, smiling from darkness into light, not one of them had asked if she, too, were freed by all her painful work.

Oh, they'd been grateful; had swept her from the open square and the wood piled high around stakes into the waiting palace; had kissed her and pledged her gifts beyond a queen's dreams. From the eldest and Heir to the scapegrace youngest, her brothers had showered her with priceless gems and exotic perfumes, extravagant gowns and jeweled slippers. The seven shirts she'd sewn from stinging nettles were framed in gilded wood and displayed on the walls of the great hall. She herself was paraded before the courtiers as if she were a dancing doll.

"See our sister," her brothers chorused. "Is she not beautiful? Is she not brave and clever? Have we not given her everything to repay our debt to her?"

Yes, the courtiers nodded as one, yes and yes and yes. And they gazed at her with covetous eyes, wondering upon whom her eldest brother would bestow her nettle-scarred and work-calloused hand.

The seven princes didn't understand why she still did not smile, or why she



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still walked mute through the glittering palace that was now theirs.

"The spell is broken, sister," the eldest prince said, "so smile and speak to us now."

And when she only gazed at him in silence and shook her head, he stalked off, angered. For now that he was Heir again, he expected his commands to be obeyed. But she had sewn a nettle shirt with her bare hands to free him. He could not command her.

"The spell is broken, sister," the youngest prince said. "Will you not smile and speak, now that we are safe?"

And when she gazed at him in silence and shook her head, he touched her arm, grieved that she would not jest and play as he wished. For he was the youngest prince, and expected the world to be a lightsome place and all to laugh their way through it.

His had been the last shirt she had sewn. It had taken her a day and a night, and had barely finished it before the final dawn. Now she looked at the red scars blotching her white fingers, and refused to accept guilt from him.

And presently her brothers accepted her sorrow and her silence, turning away from her to the duties of princes and the joys of human life. The court, too, became accustomed, and soon no one noticed as she drifted through the brilliant days, pale and silent as a swan.

When her eldest brother presented her with a jewelled locket containing the picture of a distant prince who had asked for her hand in marriage, she looked at her suitor's painted features and shook her head. "No?" said her eldest brother. "Well, then we must find you someone else to wed."

And when she shook her head again, all her brothers laughed. "Of course you will marry, sister! We will find you the most noble husband in all the lands, for only such a one is worthy of you."

Again she shook her head. No, she would not marry; could not. But her brothers paid no heed. She was a princess, therefore she must marry.

"We will find someone else," her eldest brother said again. "Someone whose face you can like. After all, sister, we owe you a great deal. I would like you to be happy in your marriage."

All through the spring and the summer hopeful princes sought her hand. And each time her eldest brother asked, "Will you have this one, sister?" she shook her head. *No.*

When the days shortened with autumn, her brother grew impatient. "You have rejected a dozen royal princes for no better reason than whim. What manner of man are you waiting for, sister? Tell me." It was an order, not a question, and when she only shook her head, he shouted angrily that she was an ungrateful girl, who gave herself airs enough for a queen.

She listened and watched him with cool bright eyes, and when he continued to reproach her, she turned silently and walked away from him. Today night's hours and day's hung in equal balance. She had no time to waste.

Built of hard grey stone, the tower was older by far than the bright palace. A relic of a time long ago, when no palace built for pleasure had stood upon the lake shore, but only a castle built for battle. Now all that remained of the old castle was used for servants, and travellers of no importance. No one used the tower at all. Among the servants, it was whispered that the tower was haunted by a princess who had been ensorcelled there.

Now another princess climbed the tower's time-smoothed stone stairs. She was not afraid of ghosts, even of the ghosts of princesses, and the tower held what she sought: a place in the sky.

The stairway curved round the tower wall, upwards past landings whose carved wooden doors opened upon lifeless rooms. One held straw, and a spinning wheel. Another was empty save for an elaborate gilded bed, its velvet hangings rotting with dust. On the landing below the rooftop, the room held only a pile of rope, its length coiled sleek and golden beneath the open window.

Once a door had protected the tower stair from the wind and rain. That door was gone, now, and only rusted iron hinges remained. Beyond the doorway the sky glowed blue and perfect, precious beyond sapphires. Holding up her trailing skirts, she climbed the last stairs and stepped out onto the tower roof.

It was quiet at the top of the old tower, its peace far removed from the bustling human world in the palace below, its only sound the wind curling through crumbling battlements. If she turned, she would look out over the palace in which she now lived. She did not turn; her eyes were drawn upward,

to the intense blue sky above.

For long minutes she sought, all her senses hunting what she knew must pass overhead, waiting as the wind rose and whipped her skirts about her like a velvet shroud. At last she heard them, their voices blown to her on the autumn wind. And then her yearning eyes saw them, flying bright as diamonds in the sun.

Swans.

They passed overhead in a thunder of snowy wings, heedless of human life below. Humans were unimportant to them as they followed the dying sun, flying southward to the summer lands.

Shading her eyes, she gazed after them as they flew past. They flew paired, lifelong mates flying so close long feathers nearly touched with each rise and fall of strong wings.

And then they were gone, their cries fading as they flew beyond the limits of her human eyes.

She bowed her head, enduring a pain too deep for tears to ease. Gone. Gone, and she left here, faithless and alone...

Far above a swan called, its cry echoing haunting and mournful through the cool air. Quickly she looked up, and saw a single swan flying, his feathers so pure a white he seemed a living pearl against the strong blue sky.

Hope sprang anew; she lifted her hands to the faraway swan and uttered an answering cry of love and desire.

His steady flight checked, and he slowed and circled high above the ancient tower. She held her breath, waiting for him to glide down to her.

But after circling the tower three times, the swan beat his powerful wings hard, flying away from her. Despairing, she called again, more urgently. But the swan was not to be fooled twice; he had looked, and seen only a treacherous human standing below. In another heartbeat he had disappeared in the sky to the south.

Desolate, she sank to her knees and bowed her head in her wounded hands. Her one chance gone, and no way to seek him after. Gone forever, as alone and bereft as she ...

Clouds swept across the pale autumn sun as she huddled upon the tower roof, mourning her lost love. Cold seeped past her velvet gown into her flesh, into her bones, and at last she raised her head from her hands to look into her barren future.

The afternoon was fading, ghosting towards night. The sun's light slanted now, transmuted the sharp blue world to shadows and amberglow. She sighed and rose to her feet, feeling the drag as her velvet skirts clung to the stones.

At the doorway to the tower stairs, she stopped and looked to the sky one last time. Heaven arched above her like a lapis bowl, beautiful and empty. She closed her eyes against its cruel lure; when she opened them again, she saw a swan's feather gleaming like a star upon the cold tower stones.

She bent and caught the feather up in fingers that trembled with hope. A wing feather, soft and strong; she slid its creamy length between her nettle-scarred fingers and joy sang through her body. He had sent her a sign, and now she knew what she must do.

The task would not be easy — but she had woven and sewn seven shirts of stinging nettles to save her brothers. She could sew one gown of swan's feathers for herself.

And the day that gown was finished, she would climb the winding stairs to this tower roof once more, but she would not walk back down those stairs again. For she would have freed herself at last; freed herself to fly at her true love's side as long as they both should live.

Nor would the task be swift — but that did not matter, for he would wait. Unlike mortal men, swans mated for life.

"I'm coming, my dearest love."

And as the wind carried her clear words southward after him, she smiled, and kissed the swan's white feather.

❄

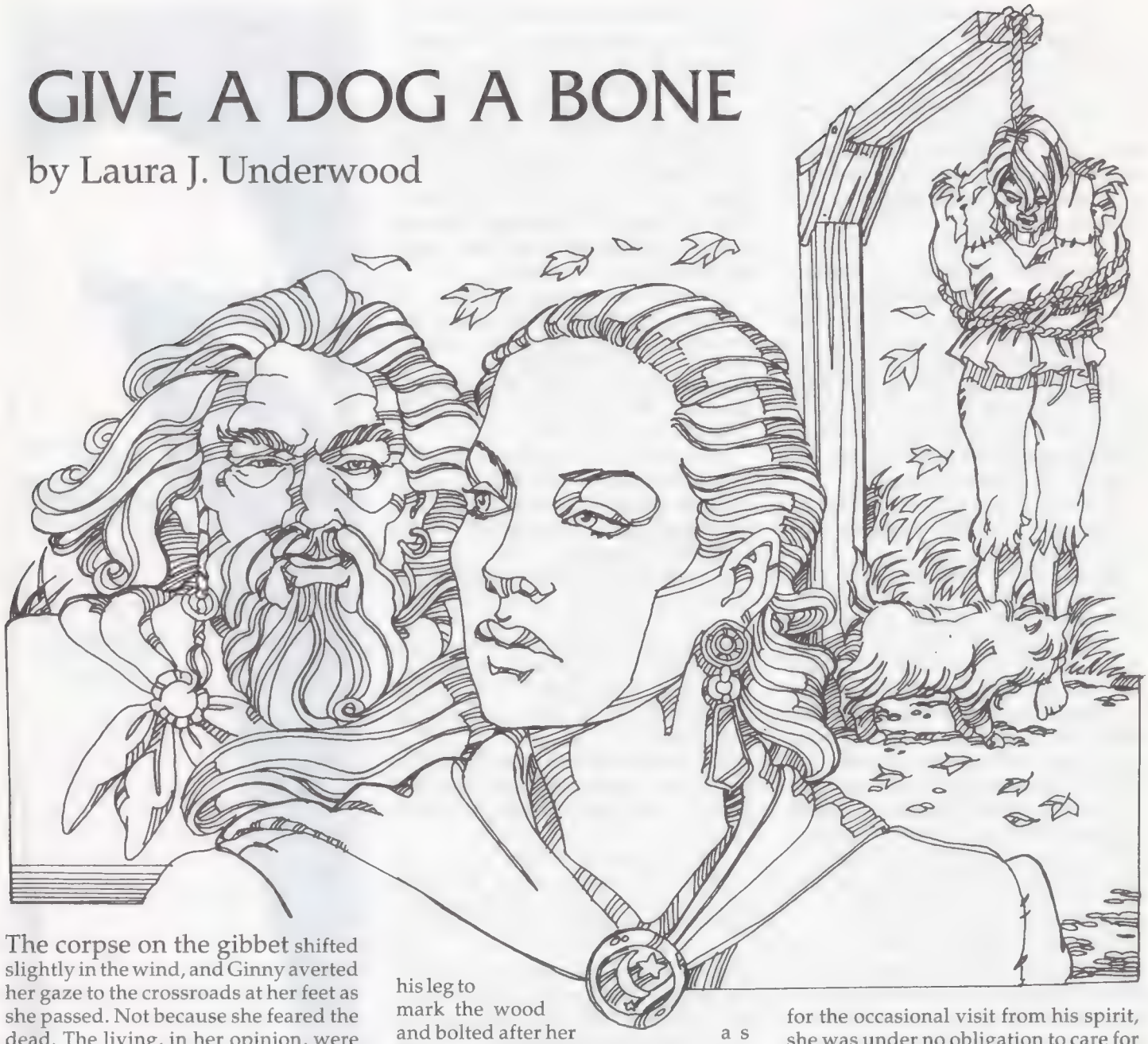
India Edghill's interest in fantasy can be blamed squarely on her father, who read her **THE WIZARD OF OZ**, **THE FIVE CHILDREN AND IT**, and **ALF'S BUTTON** before she was old enough to object. Later she discovered Andrew Lang's multi-colored fairy books, Edward Eager, and the fact that Persian cats make the best paperweights. She has sold stories to **CATFANTASTIC IV**, *Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY Magazine*, and *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. She and her cats own too many books on far too many subjects.

Nicholas Jainschigg moved a bit ago to Rhode Island with his wife Monica and a grey-cheeked parakeet. He is also knowledgeable about bats. He won the Jack Gaughan Memorial Award for Best Emerging Artist and has been Artist Guest of Honor at Boskone.

Artwork by Nicholas E. Jainschigg

GIVE A DOG A BONE

by Laura J. Underwood



The corpse on the gibbet shifted slightly in the wind, and Ginny averted her gaze to the crossroads at her feet as she passed. Not because she feared the dead. The living, in her opinion, were far more of a nuisance. But mageborn eyes often saw what mortal eyes could not, like the lingering heat of life that this man once held. Oh, he was dead, and had been for a good time now, but some dead refused to go peacefully to their rest.

Like Manus Mac Greeley.

She sighed and called to Thistle when the little Keltoran Moor Terrier gave in to canine curiosity and sniffed around the base of the gibbet. Ginny had to summon Thistle twice before he hiked his leg to mark the wood and bolted after her as she continued down the road. The hour was late, and she just wanted to get home before the last light of day faded. The basket of fresh bread and vegetables, that she had traded some of her eggs for, was growing heavy on her arm. There was a fire to build, and Thistle to feed, and a bit of neglected mending still waiting by her chair. Manus would have scolded her for wasting precious time that should have gone to studying her mageborn craft, but Manus was dead, and except for the occasional visit from his spirit, she was under no obligation to care for any but herself and Thistle. Such a life suited her just fine. The advantage of being one of the mageborn was that she could choose her own way in the world. Manus had taught her that much the night she ran away from home and found herself on his doorstep.

"Thinking on me again, Ginny?" his voice whispered to her on the wind.

Frowning, she glanced about. Sure enough, his faint spirit was manifesting at her side, ambling along as though the heather ale of which he was so fond

Artwork by James Balkovek

still had its grasp on him. He had died on the moors on a moon-washed night, too drunk to cast a spell and save himself from bandits.

"It's not that time of the month already, is it?" she said.

"The time of month has nothing to do with my comings and goings, lass," he retorted. "I come and go as I please. I was a mageborn in life."

"And a nuisance in death," she said. "Have you found your murderers yet?"

He shrugged and grasped the long end of his plaidie which he wore kilted in the old style, and drew it across his shoulders as though he could actually feel a chill. "That search will go on. Shouldn't you be getting back to the cottage? 'Tis no safe to be larking about these parts after dark — for mortal folk, that is."

"I am on my way home now," she assured him.

They were a short ways beyond the gibbet, and she saw the rows of barrow mounds that folks in these parts said were there long before the Unification. A chieftain's grave was nestled among them, some hero of the ancient wars when the powers of darkness and light did battle on Keltoran soil. Ginny grew up hearing such tales of an army of sleeping men waiting for the day when Arawn's Cauldron of Doom would spew forth an evil army to try and conquer the world.

Sunlight gave the mounds an eerie glow, and mage senses whispered of things in the mounds that she would rather not contemplate. For the most part Tamhasg Woods and the Tamhasg Barrows might be quiet, but she knew that bogie folk could be found among those mounds, and every time she passed this place, she thought she could feel their eyes.

That sense slipped over her now, and she turned to cast a glance over one shoulder, inwardly scolding herself for being foolish. Manus looked just as uneasy, for his gaze darted furtively about the lengthening shadows. She was tempted to tease him about it when she realized that Thistle was no longer at her heels. Ginny stopped in the middle of the path and glanced about at the shadows growing between the mounds.

"Thistle!" she called. "Wheesht!" Ginny whistled for good measure, and Manus echoed her calling to no avail. The Moor Terrier was not to be found. "Cursed little beastie," she hissed. "If you make me come after you!"

She might as well threaten the moon. Moor Terriers were tenacious by nature, and Thistle had learned most of his less desirable habits from Manus. Ginny sighed and started off the road and into the rows of barrows.

"This isn't such a fine place for you this time of night," Manus said, trailing after her. "Just go on home, lass, before the dark rises. Thistle will come when he's ready."

"Oh, aye, just like you," she said.

"'Tis no safe place he's gone into, lass. Ye'd best go home."

"Why? Do you think I can't hold my own against a bogie? Or have you forgotten who freed you from the Black Hunter's bargain last moon?"

"I just never liked this place much," he insisted with a frown. "These barrows bothered me enough when I was alive. Even the dead don't feel welcome here."

Ginny rolled her eyes and ignored him. "Come, Thistle," she said firmly. "I haven't got all night!"

She walked among the mounds until she reached the dolmen that stood in the very center. Bone Keeper's Croft was what the locals called it, and swore that at night one could hear the cackle of the unseelie blue woman who guarded its contents. Even as Ginny stood and looked at the six wall stones that supported a capstone and formed a little tomb, her mage senses tingled with unease. She didn't believe all the old tales Keltoran men were fond of spewing over their ale, but mageborn were closer to the seelie and unseelie that once roamed the world, and could sense things mortals did not understand. Besides, Manus had not followed her on into this place, and if a spirit found something to fear here, this was no place for even a mageborn to tarry.

"Oh, Thistle," she hissed. "Why must you be so troublesome?"

She told herself Manus might be right. That she should leave the Moor Terrier and get back on the path. He would make his way home as he always did. Besides, the sun was drifting lower, and the shadows were getting longer, and she had no desire to be wandering this place after dark.

She turned to walk away when a low moan graced her ears. "Horns!" she said and turned back towards the source of the sound. Something moved in one of the shadowy cracks formed between the wall stones of the dolman. *Bright Lady of the Silver Wheel,* she thought, dropping her basket and raising her hands in preparation of a defensive spell.

A small form bolted from those shadows, popping out from between gaps in the wall stones with a dirty white shape clutched firmly in mouth.

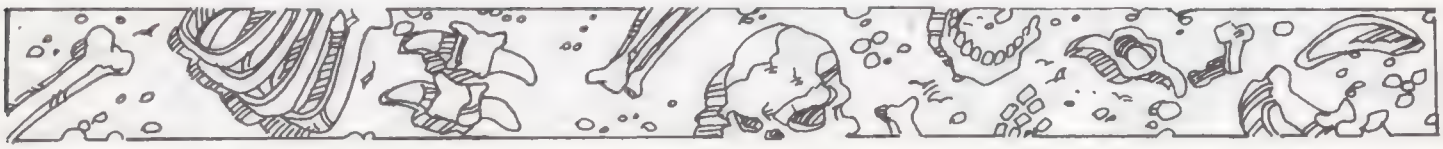
"Thistle!" she cried as the Moor Terrier dashed towards her carrying what looked like a bone. She leaned over, intending to stop him as he raced at her, but his short legs were more adapted to quick changes and maneuvers than her own. He suddenly dashed off to one side, leaving her stumbling for balance. With a startled curse of indignation, she fell, watching his little tail disappear around the mounds.

"Why you beastly little ..." Ginny bit back her words with a hiss and began gathering herself and her goods. Somewhere on the wind, she swore she heard Manus chuckling. *See if I welcome you tonight,* she fumed. She would bar the door with spells that would have sent Arawn himself running for Annwn.

In moments, she had everything back in the basket and most of her dignity intact. Muttering to herself about the inanity of four-legged creatures and dead men alike, she started out of the mounds and back onto the path. All unease left her mind under the cloak of anger. She stamped her way through Tamhasg Wood until she reached her own cottage. There she found Thistle sitting by the door, bone in mouth, thumping his tail in the dust.

"Proud of yourself, are you?" she said as she went on into the cottage and set the basket on the table. Thistle trotted in as handsome as you please and made for his favorite place by the fire to settle down and gnaw on his gruesome prize. "Just what have you got there?"

She squatted to take the bone from



Artwork by James Balkovek

him. Thistle tensed and snarled a warning. She ignored him ... at least until his small jaws snapped savagely at her extended hand. Ginny barely jerked back in time. Thistle's hackles were up now, and she could see by the gleam in his eye and the bare of his teeth, he would brook no interference from her.

"Very well," she said. "But if it makes you ill, don't come crying to me, ungrateful little ..."

She decided not to finish the description, rising to go about her own preparations. She fetched wood for the fireplace from the pile on the hearth and extended her hand over the logs and said, *"Loisg!"* Flames blossomed about the wood, and she fetched her small kettle and went out to dip water from the well in her yard.

The sky was rich magenta and charcoal blue as the last of the sun was disappearing. A wind picked up strands of her hair, tugging them playfully as she drew the bucket up ... and froze.

There was a sense of something unnatural in the woods tonight. A sense of the grave and old blood. It flared a warning through her mage senses. "Manus?" she called, hoping his spirit was behind the mischief, but if he was about, she could find no essence of him. Ginny glanced frantically at the shadows, seeking the source of her unease and seeing nothing except the silhouettes of trees and distant hills. She shivered, pouring water from the bucket into her kettle and hurrying back for the cottage door. The wind now had a chilling nip that made her want to draw her tartan shawl tightly about her shoulders.

"I stand in circles of light," she whispered and shut the door in her wake, bolting it and drawing a warding mark on the wood for good measure. The sense of unease slid away inside the protection of walls she had long ago infused with spells of warding. Still, her chest had the tightness that told her something was not right in her small world.

She glanced at Thistle. The Moor Terrier had raised his head and pricked his pointed ears towards the door. Softly, he began to growl, his coarse overcoat of long hair bristling like a lion's mane.

A fist thumped the wood of the door, and Ginny gasped, turning towards the entrance. A second thump. A third. A slow rhythmic knock that echoed.

"Who's there?" she called.

The knocking ceased.

"Who is it?" Ginny called.

Still, no reply. Slowly, Ginny backed towards the fire, her hand reaching for the iron poker. If an unseelie was at her door, she wanted to be prepared ...

The knocking began again, this time more vigorous in its rhythm.

"Who are you?" she called again.

No reply.

"What do you want?"

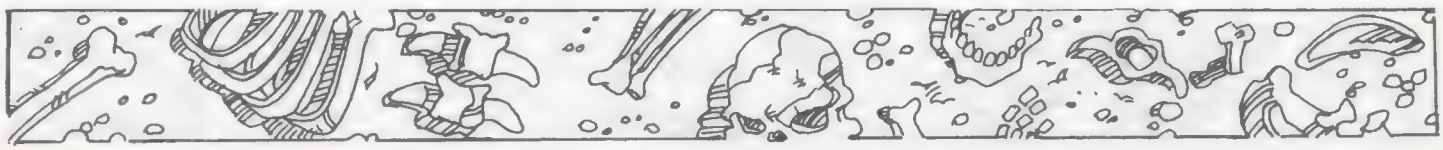
"I want my bone!" came the cackle of words.

Well, at least, it was a reply. Ginny frowned, still clutching the poker as she made for the door. Gathering her wits and the essence she would need for a spell, she unhitched the bolt and pushed it aside. Then slowly, she drew the door open, hoping her protections would hold.

A figure stood just beyond the lintel. Firelight flooded the shape wrapped in robes that had seen better days. The wearer stooped like a grandmother and one blue-skinned hand clutched a staff of aspen. *The wood used to measure graves*, Ginny thought darkly. This one was marked up and down its length with runes. She peered at the figure with an uncertain frown, still clutching the poker firmly in hand. From the depths of the hood, Ginny perceived the glitter of eyes.

"Who are you?" Ginny asked. "Answer me now or leave!"

"I am the Bone Keeper of Tamhasg Barrows," the figure replied, "and I have come to reclaim my own."



Artwork by James Balkovek

"Your own?" Ginny repeated. "Begone, creature. There's nothing for you here."

"I want my bone!" the Bone Keeper wailed, and as her voice rose to a shrill pitch, the wind picked up to howl about the cottage and lash at Ginny through the open door. She was shoved off balance by the force, and nearly thrown to the floor. Still, she managed to hold forth the iron poker, marking the air with a sigil as she shouted, *"Anail airfalbh!"* The wind ceased at once, leaving her trying to straighten the jumble of her clothes and hair as she turned a glower on the figure in the doorway. The Bone Keeper sputtered something rude under her breath and shook her aspen staff.

"Mageborn," she said. "I should have known that was the reason I could not cross your lintel to claim my own."

Ginny sighed and thought to herself about small blessings in strange disguises. "That I am," she said. "So you'd best go back to your tomb, old one, before I give in to the temptation to call white fire and turn you into grave dust..."

"But I cannot leave," the old woman insisted, shaking her head and pushing back her hood to reveal a kinder face than Ginny would have imagined for a creature who guards a grave. "Not until I fetch the bone back to where it belongs."

"The bone?" Ginny said.

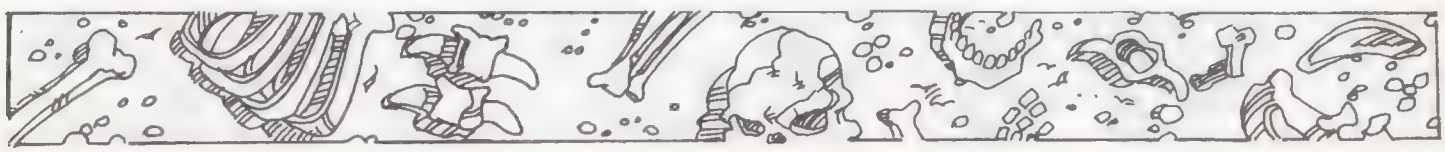
"Aye, the very one your mongrel stole from the tomb."

Ginny glanced at Thistle. The Moor Terrier had lost all interest in the women. He clutched the bone between his forepaws and furiously started to worry it with his teeth.

"What's so important about one little bone?" Ginny insisted. "The barrows are full of them ..."

"And you call yourself a keeper of the old way," the Bone Keeper said. "That is no ordinary bone! It is part of the great Keltoran Chieftain, Red Angus Mac Morroch who once stood in battle against the battlemage Dubh Cromm himself. Now he lies in my barrows, awaiting the return of the armies of darkness. When the day of the Darkening comes upon all Ard-Taebh, Red Angus will rise to meet the foe, and as with the ancient laws of the High Chiefs of Keltora, he must be whole and unblemished — not chewed upon by some silly cur! Without all his bones, he cannot rise and lead forth his armies of light ..."

"But the Law of Perfection was banished long before the Unification," Ginny said. "The Chieftains got tired of being so vain about their appearances."



Artwork by James Balkovek

"Aye, but that does not mean I can just let any beastie wander in at will and steal the bones under my charge. What would the Old Ones think of me?"

Ginny sighed. "Well, I'm not going to try and take that bone from Thistle, Chieftain or not. He's already tried to bite my hand off."

"Then I'll take it from him," the Bone Keeper said. "But first, you must invite me in, as I doubt I can reach all the way across the cottage."

Ginny frowned to hear that. Seemed like she was forever having to invite the dead and other world creatures across her threshold these days. First Manus, and now this strange unseelie woman.

"All right," Ginny said. "But leave the aspen outside." The last thing she wanted was its bad luck in her cottage.

The Bone Keeper muttered and leaned her aspen staff against the side of the cottage. Ginny stepped over to the door and gestured in the air. "Enter and be welcome, Bone Keeper of Tamhasg Barrow."

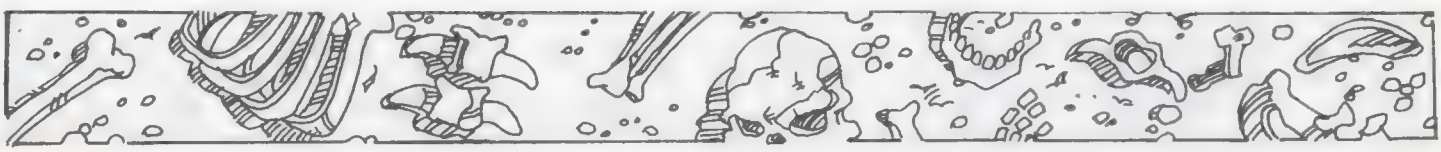
The Bone Keeper marched across the lintel without so much as a thank you and made straight for the hearth. At her approach, Thistle leapt to his feet, hackles rising as he stood protectively over the bone. Clearly, all rights of ownership aside, he was not in favor of its loss. The Bone Keeper ignored his threatening stance and leaned over to reclaim her property. With a snarl, Thistle lunged, snapping at her hand, and came close to catching it with his steely jaws. The Bone Keeper yelped and tumbled back, landing on the floor with a curse.

"Wretched beast!" the Bone Keeper howled. "I will put you in the grave myself!"

"No!" Ginny cried and rushed forward, brandishing the poker in a threatening manner.

The Bone Keeper threw up her frail arms to hide her face from the approach of cold iron. At the same moment, Thistle lunged at her, latching hold of her ragged clothes. The Bone Keeper tried to surge away from both threats to no avail. Thistle jerked and tugged, and Ginny heard the sound of cloth tearing as she held back her own blow.

Her eyes fell upon the unprotected bone beside the hearth. Ginny snatched it up with a triumphant cry. She ran for



Artwork by James Balkovek

the open door and tossed it out, hoping the Bone Keeper would follow it. Alas, Thistle saw her take it, and in true terrier fashion, he abandoned his attack on the Bone Keeper to rush for the stolen prize as it landed out in the dark. At the same time, the Bone Keeper scrambled to her feet and charged out the door with an angry shriek. Ginny took just a moment to strengthen the magical wards protecting her door before bolting after the pair.

She could hear Thistle's growls of defiance off in the woods now, as well as the Bone Keeper's angry threats. The Moor Terrier had apparently regained his prize and chosen to flee rather than risk sacrificing it again. Ginny burst after them, hoping to keep Thistle from harm. The loose branches of trees slapped her as she ran. She did wonder why she had not considered leaving the little beast to his fate for all the trouble he was causing now, but then, he was good company on cold nights. And besides, she had always felt obligated to look after him once Manus died and left the beast in her care.

"Ginny!" Manus called, and she stopped, turning to find his spirit wafting with her among the trees. "What in the name of Cernunnos are you doing out here, lass?"

"Thistle stole a Chieftain's bone from the Tamhasg Barrows, and he refuses to give it up. Now the Bone Keeper's trying to get it back, and I fear she'll do him harm."

"That old blue harridan?" Manus muttered unfavorably. "She's all vinegar and wind, that one."

"She promised to bury him once she catches him," Ginny said. "I've got to help him ..."

"Just give him another bone, then," Manus said.

Ginny stared at him as though he'd grown another head. "Another bone?" she repeated.

"Aye. A fresh one, if ye can come by it. He's a greedy little beast."

"But I haven't got another bone!" she said, sounding outraged. The last soup bone she'd even possessed had long ago been chewed to bits by the little Moor Terrier.

"Well, then improvise," Manus said. "You are mageborn."

Ginny reared back. "Improvise?"

"Conjure one that's more tempting than that he has," Manus said. "I know I've taught ye the spell."

"But I can't conjure something out of nothing," she protested. "No mageborn can."

"No, but ye can remake something into something else when necessary," Manus said gleefully. "All ye need is a piece of wood ... or that poker you're waving about like a sword."

Ginny made a face and glanced at the iron poker coated with charcoal from constant use. It was worth a try, especially when she heard the pitiful yelp of a dog being struck at, and the angry curse of an unseelie who missed getting a better blow. The poker weighed heavily in Ginny's hands. She closed her eyes and drew power from the world around her, and softly whispered in the mage tongue, "Be as bone ..."

The cold iron warmed in her grasp, and when she opened her eyes, she found herself holding a gleaming white bone. The bits of charcoal clung to it as tags of cooked flesh, and the bone was much larger than the one Thistle now carried.

"That should do the trick," Manus said. "Good luck."

He faded before Ginny could even say thank you. With a shake of her head, she hurried on, searching for the path that would lead to the Tamhasg Barrows. She found it and ran as fast as she could, grateful that mage eyes could see in the dark. Soon, she found herself at the mounds, and she ran among them until she reached the dolmen at their heart.

Thistle was there, as was the Bone Keeper. The old woman was holding up her aspen staff, preparing to strike the Moor Terrier. Thistle was backed against the stones, the bone lying between his feet. He lowered his head and ears, and bared white teeth in a snarl.

"You mangy little wretch!" the Bone Keeper hissed. "I'll teach you to steal from my graves! I shall have your entrails in a haggis this very night."

She started to swing the aspen staff at Thistle's head, when Ginny cried "Wait," and tossed the false bone into the Bone Keeper's path. "Thistle, fetch!"

The Moor Terrier needed no encouragement. He dove on the false bone, seizing it in greedy jaws and pelting for the nearest opening in the mounds. At the same time, the Bone Keeper dove on her prize and caught it up with a cry of triumph ... only to twist her face in disgust to find the bone slathered in dog slobber.

"You have your bone back!" Ginny said and raised her hands, ready to call white fire. "Now, return to your grave!"

"With pleasure," the Bone Keeper sang. "Just keep that cur away from my barrow mounds, or I will make haggis of him."

Before Ginny could counter the threat, the Bone Keeper slid into the narrow gap between the dolmen wall stones, becoming part of the shadows within, and disappeared from sight.

Ginny sighed and looked around. No sign of Thistle now. She left the barrows and hurried down the path through the woods, practically running until she reached the cottage once more. There, she found Thistle had entered the open door and promptly placed himself before the fire with his new prize. Ginny closed the door and bolted it, then dropped into her chair. What a night, she thought as she watched the Moor Terrier laboriously gnawing the poker bone clean of its charcoal flesh.

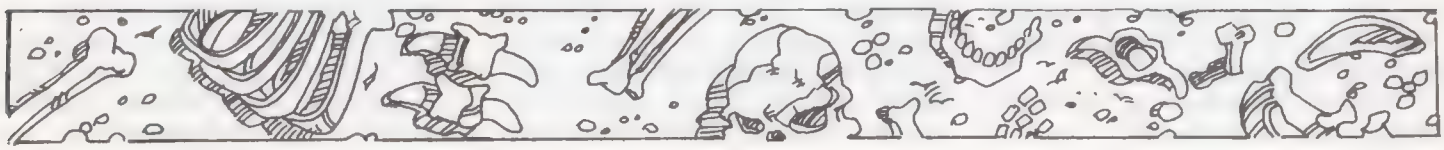
She probably should have taken it from him and turned it back into cold iron, but Thistle looked like he would tolerate no further interruption of his pleasure. *Give a dog a bone, and you're not likely to get it back,* she thought.

Then again, that was one bone she doubted he could chew to bits.

❄

Laura J. Underwood writes: "This story is dedicated to the Rowdy Lass who crossed into the Summerland November 7, 1998. I suspect she is over there, chasing squirrels (and catching them this time), tearing apart cheesy rawhide strips and gulping down masses of McDonald's french fries. She will be missed."

James Balkovek illustrates frequently for these pages.



The Mountains of Helvar

by Patricia Duffy Novak

As Garrin traveled the last stretch of road toward Camp Martin-on-the-River, he fought a panicky urge to turn his horse and gallop back the way he'd come. Striving for calm, he took a deep breath of fragrant, earth-scented air. The spring thaw had opened the mountain passes. Soon, if this year followed the usual pattern, renegade Helvari warlords would attempt to push their way southward, into Alworyn. The soldiers at the camp would have to accept Garrin as their captain, or all chaos would run wild.

Then again, he told himself glumly, the soldiers might very well prefer chaos to his command.

As he reined in Fanfare at the wooden guardhouse, a scout came out to meet him. The scout was a short, bow-legged fellow with brown hair that hung shaggily to his shoulders. Like Garrin, he wore no uniform, but dressed instead in mountain garb — leather breeches, scuffed boots, and a thick woolen jacket.

Mac Tom was the scout's name, a fairly new addition to the unit. Garrin had encountered Mac Tom a few months ago when he had come to camp to give his final report to Captain Nigel. Mac Tom hadn't even offered his hand when Nigel introduced him, but of course the little scout hadn't needed to feign respect for Garrin at that meeting. Garrin had been nothing more than a scout himself then, despite all his decorations from the king.

As Garrin swung from the saddle, Mac Tom gave a perfunctory salute, just this side of insolence.

"Captain Windson, sir." Mac Tom didn't meet Garrin's gaze.

Exactly what Garrin had expected, and yet he still felt the sting of the man's contempt. He only hoped his expression didn't betray his emotion. Probably it did not. He'd been told, by the scant few friends he'd made, that his face was like a page written in a foreign tongue, unreadable to those who hadn't studied it for years.

Fanfare stomped briefly, then quieted, as Garrin removed his saddlebags, harp, and sword.

"Take my horse to the stables," he said briskly to Mac Tom. Garrin towered over the scout. Whenever he spoke to short men, Garrin felt not superior, as some tall men might, but gangly and ill at ease.

"And when you're done with the horse," Garrin went on, "find Lieutenant Lev and tell him my orders are to have all the scouts currently in camp assemble for my inspection at seventeen hundred hours."

"Yes, sir," Mac Tom answered. Then, in a sullen tone. "Do you want help with those?" He gestured at Garrin's belongings.

Garrin shook his head. "I can find my own way through camp. And —" He knew he needed time to compose himself before the inspection. "I don't wish to be disturbed in my quarters. Understood?"

The scout hesitated, mouth puckered as if to keep back an acerbic comment, no doubt something to the effect that no one in his right mind would visit Garrin Windson uncoerced. "Yes, sir," he finally said.

The gaze that met Garrin's was hostile, but nothing in this man's conduct left Garrin room to issue a reprimand. Mac Tom had done his duty, even though making it clear he wished Garrin in Nedral's lowest hell.

Artwork by K. L. Darnell

As Garrin walked off, splashing heedlessly through slushy puddles, he could feel Mac Tom watching. Thirty men and women in this unit, all of whom, Garrin suspected, would treat him with the same respectful hatred. Silently, he cursed Captain Nigel for retiring, leaving this position vacant. More vehemently, he cursed the general who'd ordered him to take this commission. He didn't belong here. He knew that as surely as Mac Tom did.

From the gatehouse path, the main trail veered to the right, toward the barracks. A narrower track turned to the left, toward an old stone mess hall, clearly built long before the rest of the camp. Garrin turned that way.

The captain's quarters — a ramshackle two-room cabin — stood a few hundred yards behind the mess, atop a small hill. Six times a year, since he'd joined the army four years past, Garrin had made his way to these quarters to tell Captain Nigel of his activities. By blood, Garrin was half Helvari, and he could speak the language fluently. He'd penetrated deep into the borderlands, further than the one-day's travel limit set by the distant Worhold generals for the scouts' protection. Because Garrin quietly broke those rules, he had often learned of new threats before they developed into serious menaces. Captain Nigel seldom asked for awkward details that would force Garrin either to lie or to reveal how he'd disregarded orders. For the most part, Nigel left him alone, which had suited Garrin well.

Garrin entered the cabin and stowed his gear, a simple task given the small number of personal items he owned. Then he went out and stood on the back porch. The River Alovar, broad and flat at this crossing, stretched below, gleaming gold and orange in the afternoon sun. On both sides of the river, mountains rose, enclosing the valley like giant hands. Snow-topped, majestic, in shades of green and white and gray, the mountains were so beautiful it was easy sometimes for Garrin to forget what evil could come out of them.

Which warlords would invade this year, Garrin wondered, and where would they strike? What rogue mages would be attracted to which banners? The threat to Alworyn's peace from rogue Helvari mages was sufficiently bad that even the Wizards' Council had set up its own border patrol. Fortunately for Alworyn's safety, the sorcerers were a notoriously treacherous lot, almost never working together for any sustained purpose.

About a mile to the west, Garrin could make out the central tower of the outpost of the Wizards of the Ways. Separate from the army, and yet connected with it, the wizards lived a far less spartan existence, the lowest ranking of them drawing five times the pay of an army captain. Had Garrin's life gone differently, he would have numbered among them.

As he thought of the blue silk Adept robe that lay crumpled at the bottom of his saddlebags, some of that old resentment welled up in him, bitter as a brackish spring. There was a traitor among Alworyn's wizards, a murderer who'd destroyed Garrin's village and contrived to make it appear Garrin's doing. Despite having witnesses who could place him elsewhere at the time, Garrin had never been able to fully clear his name, although he had escaped formal punishment. Despite four years of respectable service to the king, Garrin remained under a cloud of hate and suspicion, despised by wizards and soldiers alike.

He pushed aside the dark emotions that churned in him, refusing to wallow in self pity, a bog he'd found all too attractive in these last few years.

Footsteps sounded along the path.

He uttered a curse — irritated that some soldier saw fit to disturb his privacy — then choked on the words as he turned and saw his visitor. No soldier, this.

A woman in a red wizard's robe stood a few feet away. Garrin knew her slightly. Ressa Fervini, the Adept in charge of the nearby wizard's outpost. She was a little older than Garrin, with the tawny hair and tanned skin of the seacoast people. For one insane moment, he thought she might have come to extend the hospitality of the wizards' hall — a hospitality which remained his by right, despite all that had happened — but that thought vanished as he looked at her grim face.

"What do you want with me, Res?" He chose the familiar form of her name. They held the same wizard's rank, after all.

She took a step closer, her eyes sparking with a surprising fury; most wiz-

Artwork by K. L. Darnell

ards met him with cold disdain, not outright wrath. "I've come about Loranne MacSaorin," she said.

Garrin knew that name. Loranne, three years his junior, had overlapped with him a little in school at Wizards' Keep. He hadn't seen her for years, but had heard she'd joined the staff of the outpost. A quiet girl, the daughter of some minor lowland lord, she'd had little enough to do with him when they were both at the Keep, which wasn't surprising to Garrin given the differences in their ages and positions. He was base-born — the ill-gotten son of some Helvari sorcerer who'd raped an Alworyn border woman. Most of the lowland wizards had never fully accepted him, even before the scandal.

"What about Loranne?" Garrin asked.

"No one has seen her since morning."

"So?" He shrugged, not seeing why Ressa was so upset. If the girl wanted some time alone, whose business was it?

Ressa's eyes narrowed. "I find it odd that Loranne should disappear on the very day you arrive in camp."

Now, he understood. He held Ressa's gaze until she looked away. He had no real concern for Loranne's safety. Kidnapping a wizard of the Ways, even an inexperienced one, was well beyond the scope of any single Helvari sorcerer he'd ever met, and the Helvari mages had never, in his previous experience, worked in teams. The girl had no doubt gone somewhere and neglected to mention it. Or maybe she'd just gotten lost.

"You know I'm bonded," Garrin said. After the destruction of Avenore, he'd had himself mage-linked to Master Fen, the only senior member of the Order of the Four Ways who believed him wholly innocent. Garrin could not now work a spell of any kind without Master Fen knowing it. The link had saved him all sorts of trouble.

Ressa looked him over coldly. "Who's to say you abducted Loranne yourself? With all the time you've spent in the borderlands, perhaps you've made some friends."

Garrin exhaled slowly. This was an accusation he hadn't heard before — that he conspired with Helvari mages. "You're accusing me of treason?"

"You said that, not I."

He felt surprisingly little anger, just a small cold pain in the pit of his stomach.

Without another word, he went into the cabin and grabbed his sword, then headed down the hill toward the barracks, determined to find the wayward Loranne as quickly as possible and get this accusation behind him. Ressa followed, jogging to keep up. She flapped along in her red robe, reminding Garrin of one of the mythical fire-maidens from the Sky Lord's Court.

Despite the unpleasantness of the situation, Garrin couldn't help but find one small blessing. At least now he had an excuse to avoid a formal inspection of his troops.

Lieutenant Lev scrambled to attention as Garrin strode into the man's quarters with Ressa in his wake. No member of this scout company, except Garrin himself, was a full wizard, but some were Half-Talents, mildly gifted in magic. Lev was one of the stronger of these. Garrin didn't need a Half-Talent, however. He knew he could handle a Helvari sorcerer easily enough if it came to that, which he didn't think it would. He wanted a tracker. When he explained the situation, the lieutenant suggested Mac Tom.

Given Tom's reception at the gate, Garrin nearly told Lev to choose another man, but Garrin didn't want to air his problems in front of Ressa. Besides, the notes he'd reviewed in Worhold indicated that Mac Tom had a small but useful talent, the ability to sense magic.

Garrin nodded his accord. The lieutenant left, and in a matter of seconds — faster than Garrin thought possible — Lev returned with the scout. Mac Tom eyed Garrin coolly, and Garrin read in his expression the same accusation Ressa had leveled. Fortunately, Mac Tom had the good sense to hold his tongue.

In the woods around the wizards' outpost, Mac Tom and Garrin cast for signs of Loranne's passage. Around them, a half dozen wizards from the outpost stomped and hollered, setting tracking spells and generally getting in the way.

As the sun sank behind the mountains, and the dusk washed the colors from the world, Garrin grew worried. The girl wouldn't stay out so late on purpose, and if she were merely lost, she could send out mage flares, which would be easily visible in the looming dark. Garrin still didn't suspect foul play, but had come to think that Loranne had met with an accident that left her too injured to work magic.

The wizards had hopelessly muddled the trails near the base. Garrin decided that the search would have to move further out, which meant he'd need more scouts.

He looked around for Mac Tom, to send him back to camp to get a party together. Before he could call out, the scout came running up, leaping over brush and fallen logs.

"Captain!" Mac Tom was out of breath, his words coming in short bursts. "This way, sir. I've found something."

Garrin loped after Mac Tom, down a narrow path, through the low brambles between the trees, to a little, burbling stream. Ressa chased after them, her long robe catching on brambles, making her snarl in frustration.

"Here," Tom said, as he and Garrin reached a flat spot near a large rock that overhung the stream. Ressa was still somewhere behind them, crashing through the brush.

Mac Tom looked at Garrin anxiously. "Can you feel it?"

Garrin had never been able to "feel" the traces of magic, not the way Mac Tom meant, but if a spell was fairly recent, he could usually see them. He relaxed his thoughts, opening the special vision wizards called mage-sight.

Mage swirls covered the ground, the sickly purple hue of blood sorcery. Three distinct mage-marks, tainted by corruption, and then a fourth, clear and gray and overpowered — Loranne's mark. Garrin's stomach knotted. Holding up three fingers, he looked at Tom.

The little scout nodded.

"Nedral's bloody hand!" Garrin cursed. Why in the world would three Helvari sorcerers — uncooperative, pride-filled, always at each other's throats — conspire to steal a novice mage from Alworyn? Loranne wasn't even particularly talented, a common Gray mage never likely to rise about the rank of journeyman. She could be of no use to the Helvaris that Garrin could see. Probably, they'd ask for ransom. The Order of the Four Ways was rich enough, but it irked him to have the girl stolen from under his nose.

"Get horses and gear," he said to Mac Tom. "For you and for me. I'll need a supply horse; my own has gone far enough today." Then, optimisti-

cally, he added, "And bring an extra horse for Loranne."

"Aye, sir," Mac Tom said, then ran toward the camp.

As Mac Tom left, Ressa reached the stream. Robe torn and out of breath, she glared at Garrin. "Stop running off like that! I won't have it."

Garrin pointed at the ground. "Look," he said quietly.

Her gaze followed his finger. "Dear Gods." Then she looked up. "What have your friends done to her, you lying, murdering, creature of the darkness?"

He'd been called worse names and had learned to ignore them. But as he watched, her hands began to glow with a summoning of power. In a moment, she would be ready to strike with fire, the one element Garrin could not summon.

But he could quench it, as easily as he breathed. He extended his hand and sent forth a barely-perceptible pulse of energy. The red cloud vanished.

Ressa clutched her heart and stared, eyes wide. It was too often so with wizards of his order, Garrin had observed. They could be told a dozen times about the scope of his powers, but they would not believe until they had tested him.

"You have just committed treason," he said in a dry tone. "You tried to attack an officer commissioned by the king."

"I'm trying to protect a girl in my charge." Ressa stood stiffly erect, but some of the arrogance had left her voice. "That is hardly treason. No one in Worhold would convict me of trying to strike at you."

"Do you think I don't know that?" Garrin struggled to keep the anger from his voice, but failed. "You think I don't know how they hate me — people who know nothing of me except the lies spread by wizards like you."

She said nothing.

He bit down on his lip, so hard he tasted blood. "Why in the Five Hells would I abduct Loranne? Can you tell me that? If I wanted to steal more power I could have taken it a hundred times over — from you or any other wizard, not from some novice with a minimum of talent. And if I wanted a woman for some more fundamental purpose, there are plenty of them to be had willingly — prettier ones, too."

She lowered her gaze.

As close to an apology as he would ever get, Garrin realized. He forced

Artwork by K. L. Darnell

himself to refocus. "Now, do you want to find Loranne or not? I'm prepared to ignore your feelings toward me if you can do the same. I have no fire magic. I cannot cast light in the darkness. I'll need your help if we're to track Loranne before daybreak, and I don't think it prudent to wait."

She looked at him. Even in the gathering dark he could see the war of emotions across her face.

Garrin let out his breath. "If I wanted to kill you, I'd do it now. There'd be no point in luring you into a trap. Everyone in this camp will know you left with me."

"All right," she finally said.

"Get a horse then," Garrin said. "And get out of that stupid robe. The going is rough in the mountains."

She stumbled off, calling for her friends. Garrin sat on the rock, waiting for Mac Tom to return, and studied the swirls more carefully. He recognized none of the patterns, but each of the sorcerers held considerable power. One in particular looked formidable. Still, Garrin was certain that even collectively they would be no match for him. His only concern was finding them; if they used blood magic to hide their trail, they would be nearly impossible to track. If he found them, the rest, he thought, would be easy.

They forded the river Alovar at a shallow, rocky crossing, then pushed into the borderlands. Ressa, mounted on a sturdy roan, wore sensible attire, breeches and a heavy overtunic and cloak. Mac Tom, astride a shaggy mountain beast, carried a bow and quiver of arrows, more useful than a sword against mages if one were not a mage oneself. Most mages could turn a sword against its owners, although such tricks would not work against Garrin. His sword contained an energy sink, ideally matched to his own magical field. Mac Tom led another horse, saddled and ready for Loranne, if they found her.

With Ressa casting a light spell, Mac Tom easily tracked the route the sorcerers had taken. To Garrin's surprise, they hadmade only a perfunctory effort to disguise their passage. Even Garrin — no expert tracker — could see their marks. The tracks led upwards, into the mountains. In the higher elevations, the snow had not yet melted, making the trail entirely visible, even to a casual glance.

For the most part, the three of them rode in an uneasy silence, broken only by an occasional comment from Mac Tom, about the condition of the road.

By dawn, the horses had begun to lather, and Ressa's shoulders slumped in exhaustion. Mac Tom had dark rings under his eyes, but seemed otherwise alert. At the top of a rise, near a crossroad, while the others rested and the horses ate the compressed grain Mac Tom had carried for them, Garrin surveyed the landscape. He could see the horse tracks continuing on, across the next rise, not veering to the right or left. His spirits sank as he realized the sorcerers were heading deep into Helvar.

"Mac Tom," he called to the scout, who came at his bidding, curiosity visible on his face.

"We'll have to go back," Garrin said. "We're already a full day's ride past the border."

Mac Tom nodded. "Aye, sir."

In truth, Garrin had not the least intention of abandoning the girl, but neither would he break rules in front of Mac Tom. He remembered the look Mac Tom had given him at the gate. The scout would be only too happy to report Garrin to the king. And Ressa would be equally glad to do the same.

"We can't go on, Res," Garrin said to her. "We're not supposed to travel more than a day's journey into Helvar. I'm

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sure Loranne will be all right. The sorcerers who took her will probably want to ransom her."

He expected a protest, but she only let out a long sigh. "Yes," she said. "I expect you're right." She gave him a hard glance, as if measuring his intentions.

"I don't need money," Garrin said, guessing the direction of her thoughts. "The army pay is low but my habits are simple."

She shrugged, which he took as acquiescence. They remounted and headed toward the border. Garrin let Mac Tom and Ressa get a bit ahead. When he lost sight of them around a bend in the trail, he turned and trotted back along the path they'd already traveled. Later he would make some excuse about taking an alternate route home. No one would question him too closely if he brought Loranne back safely. Or if they did, they'd get no answers. Loranne's word could be easily discounted. Kidnapped, distraught women were not always the best judges of distances.

As Garrin rode on, he thought about the kidnapping. It was indeed odd that Loranne would disappear on the very day he arrived in camp. And it was odder still that three Helvari sorcerers would conspire to steal a weakly-talented girl. And it was perhaps oddest of all that three sorcerers — who could use blood magic as well as wizardry — had not attempted to hide their trails.

Odd, odder, oddest. He mused on these events, his mind too tired from the sleepless night to make any connection.

After another dozen miles, the trail dipped downward. At the base, in a little valley, he spied a cabin, with three horses tied to a rail outside. He saw no signs of the sorcerers, and believed they must be inside, with Loranne.

He dismounted, leaving the horse to search among the brambles for shoots of green. He walked forward, between two trees, planning to encircle the cabin with a power web. Then he could go inside and force down the sorcerers one by one. *Easy as picking berries*, he thought.

His foot landed on ground that felt subtly wrong. A moment later, an energy sink engulfed him. Twisted ropes of mage-energy shot from the ground, snaring his hands and preventing his from summoning his power.

Three sorcerers emerged from the shadows, sending lines of perverted energy toward him. Blood magic. Garrin felt nausea rise as the foul forces touched him.

One of the three sorcerers had a deep scar cutting across one flat eyelid and down into his cheek. *Vard Bluckenstone*. Garrin knew his name and his description from a scout report. Lieutenant Lev, trying to trap Vard, had done the damage to his face, but Vard had escaped.

Vard laughed, as he twisted the power lines, pulling Garrin to his knees. "The others said it wouldn't be so easy." He spoke in harsh Helvari. "That the great Garrin Windson could not be caught. I said all it would take from us was a bit of cooperation. You were every bit as gullible as I'd hoped. Too long you've gone unchallenged. It's all been too easy for you. Until now."

The web closed about Garrin, stealing his breath. Desperately he tried to move his hand, but could not. He cursed his own stupidity, then he sent up a prayer, asking the Gods to judge him mercifully in death. The only thing he regretted was that he wouldn't live long enough to find the traitor who'd destroyed his village.

Before he could finish praying, an arrow whizzed past. It lodged in the chest of the one-eyed sorcerer. With a gasp, the man fell upon the ground, a crimson stain spreading across his chest. The other two sorcerers repositioned themselves, striving to hold the bonds, but the web weakened. Garrin didn't look about for his deliverer, but instead let out a flux of energy and shattered the magic chains.

By the time Garrin had his hands on his sword, a second sorcerer fell to an arrow. The third started to run, but not fast enough. An arrow caught him in the back.

"Damn good thing I came after you." Mac Tom stepped from behind an outcrop. He held his bow in one hand, eyeing Garrin.

"Yes," Garrin agreed. Despite the coolness of the air, sweat had beaded on his brow. He wiped it off with the woolen sleeve of his jacket. "When I was a student at Wizards' Keep, Master Fen used to tell me I had a good mind, but that I too seldom bothered to use it. It never occurred to me that Loranne was bait in a trap. I'm glad one of us was thinking clearly. Good work, scout."

Mac Tom tilted his head. "I can't take credit for being any smarter than I am. I didn't think of a trap either, sir."

"What?" Garrin's back tensed as he realized what thoughts probably had gone through the scout's mind. "Did you think I'd come to join the sorcerers? To share in the ransom they hoped to get?"

Mac Tom's silence gave Garrin his answer. Garrin shrugged, feigning a nonchalance he didn't feel. "I came to rescue the girl. Since you're here you might as well help. If there are any more magical traps, perhaps you can sense them."

Mac Tom nodded his agreement. He and Garrin moved together toward the cabin, treading softly and flitting in and out of shadows. But there appeared to be no one else in the yard. "Look there," Mac Tom said once. When Garrin followed the direction of his finger, he could see nothing. But he took Mac Tom's word that a trap was there. This one he avoided.

Garrin braced against the door of the cabin, Mac Tom covering him with his arrows. With his shoulder, Garrin burst inside, to find Loranne, alone, bound by iron chains, bruised, with her clothing half torn away. One look in her eyes and Garrin knew what the sorcerers had done.

She cowered. "Loranne," Garrin said softly. "I've come to take you home." Like all special unit soldiers, he carried a lock pick in a pocket of a boot. He bent to take it out, but before he could, she straightened up, her eyes fierce. Mac Tom walked through the doorway as she spoke.

"I'm not going home. I cannot. Not with the disgrace I bear. They hurt me." She winced, her chained hands covering her stomach.

Mac Tom's gaze traveled across her form. He glanced at Garrin obliquely, his face going pale.

"You will live through this," Garrin said. "I ought to know." He put down his sword, shrugged out of his jacket, then began to unbutton his shirt.

Mac Tom's face turned livid, and he put his hand on the knife at his belt. "I don't care how much power you have. I'll kill you if you touch her."

"Wait." Garrin raised a hand to stay him, then pulled off his shirt. He turned, exposing to Mac Tom and Loranne the criss-cross of old scars. He heard the quick sound of sucked in breaths.

He put his shirt back on, then turned

to face Loranne. Her face had gone pale. "You will live through this," Garrin said again. "You will not die of the pain."

"What happened to your back?" Mac Tom asked in a low voice.

The scars on Garrin's back itched as he remembered. "I let a cow get out of the pasture when I was eleven years old. My stepfather beat me for it. I very nearly died. They say my first act as a grown wizard was to kill him and everyone else in Avenore for revenge. That's a lie." Garrin met Mac Tom's gaze and held it until the scout looked away.

Loranne raised her chin. "But this is different." She gestured at her torn gown. "What they did to me. The shame." She lowered her eyes. "I cannot live with the disgrace."

Garrin snorted. "You speak to me of living with disgrace? Have you forgotten who I am?"

She tensed. "I have not forgotten. But you deserve the shame you bear. I don't."

Garrin put on his jacket and picked up his sword. He looked at Loranne, seeing the contempt for him that sparked in her eyes, stronger than her fear and pain. "I only hope the world deals more kindly with you than it has with me," he said.

He turned to his scout. "Mac, get her out of those chains and take her back to the wizards, will you? And bring the sorcerers' horses, too. The army will make good use of them. I'll see you at camp."

Without waiting for an answer, Garrin turned and left the cabin. He passed the three bodies sprawled on the ground, barely glancing at them. Instead he went to find his horse. The animal was where Garrin had left him, grazing placidly on the sparse green shoots among the patches of mud and snow. Garrin mounted and rode off, not bothering to look back.

He arrived at camp near sundown, an hour or so before supper. In his cabin, he sat at his desk, writing a somewhat abbreviated report with a blotchy ink pen that Captain Nigel had left behind. The fire on his hearth cast its flickering light over the pages, supplementing the dwindling rays of sunlight.

He turned when he heard his door opening. Mac Tom was standing at the threshold.

"I returned that wizard girl to her people," Mac Tom said. There was no hint of his former insolence in his voice. "She'll be all right in time, I think. Once she gets over the shock of it. Nasty business, that."

"Yes. Thank you." Garrin expected him to leave, but Mac Tom didn't budge. "What is it?" Garrin prodded.

"Humm." Mac Tom looked at the floor, then at Garrin's harp, and finally at Garrin himself. "That harp. I'm told you play it well, sir."

"Some people say I do."

"Well, some of the scouts were wondering if maybe you'd come to the hall and play it for us, before dinner. If you would. Maybe. Sir." Mac Tom shuffled where he stood.

Garrin gave him a long glance. "They want me to do that?"

Mac Tom colored slightly. "Yes, sir. They do."

"All right." Garrin gathered up his harp and followed Mac Tom down the hill. In the dining hall, a dozen scouts had already congregated. They stood at attention, near the fire. From the kitchen, in the rear of the hall, came the sound of pots clanging, and the smell of boiling potatoes and braised meat.

"At ease," Garrin said. When he seated himself on one of the room's small wooden chairs, the others relaxed. "Well," he said briskly. "What is it you want me to play? Sad ballads? Brisk dance tunes?"

No one spoke.

Finally, Lev broke the silence. "Play whatever you like, Captain."

Garrin put his hands on the strings, finding the opening chord of the Worhold Lad, a silly song about a city-boy who joined the border patrol, but carried all his comforts with him.

Mac Tom grinned as he recognized the tune. Garrin sang, and Mac Tom joined him. Mac Tom's voice — higher than Garrin's — made good harmony. They sang a dozen verses of the song, some of the other scouts joining in the chorus.

When the song had finished, Lieutenant Lev came forward, a mug in his hand. The liquid in it gleamed gold in the firelight. "It ain't regulation, sir," Lev said. "But Captain Nigel let us make our own brew."

He put the glass in Garrin's hand, then waited for a reaction. "Thank you," Garrin finally said, his voice creaking.

Mac Tom sidled up to Garrin. "I told 'em," he said in a low voice, that only Garrin would hear. "Told them what you did for that ungrateful wizard girl. Risking your life. To be treated like a thief." He shook his head. "You're no murderer, Captain. Them wizards are fools."

Garrin took a long pull on the ale. It was a hearty, yeasty brew. Better than most of the stuff served in border taverns. He nodded his appreciation at Lev.

"You do all right, captain," Mac Tom said. "You do just fine."

Garrin knew the man wasn't talking about the music. "Thank you," he said softly. "So do you."

He had time for one more song before supper. This time, the scouts shouted requests. Garrin settled on the one that had the loudest support. Then he put down his mug and played. ❄

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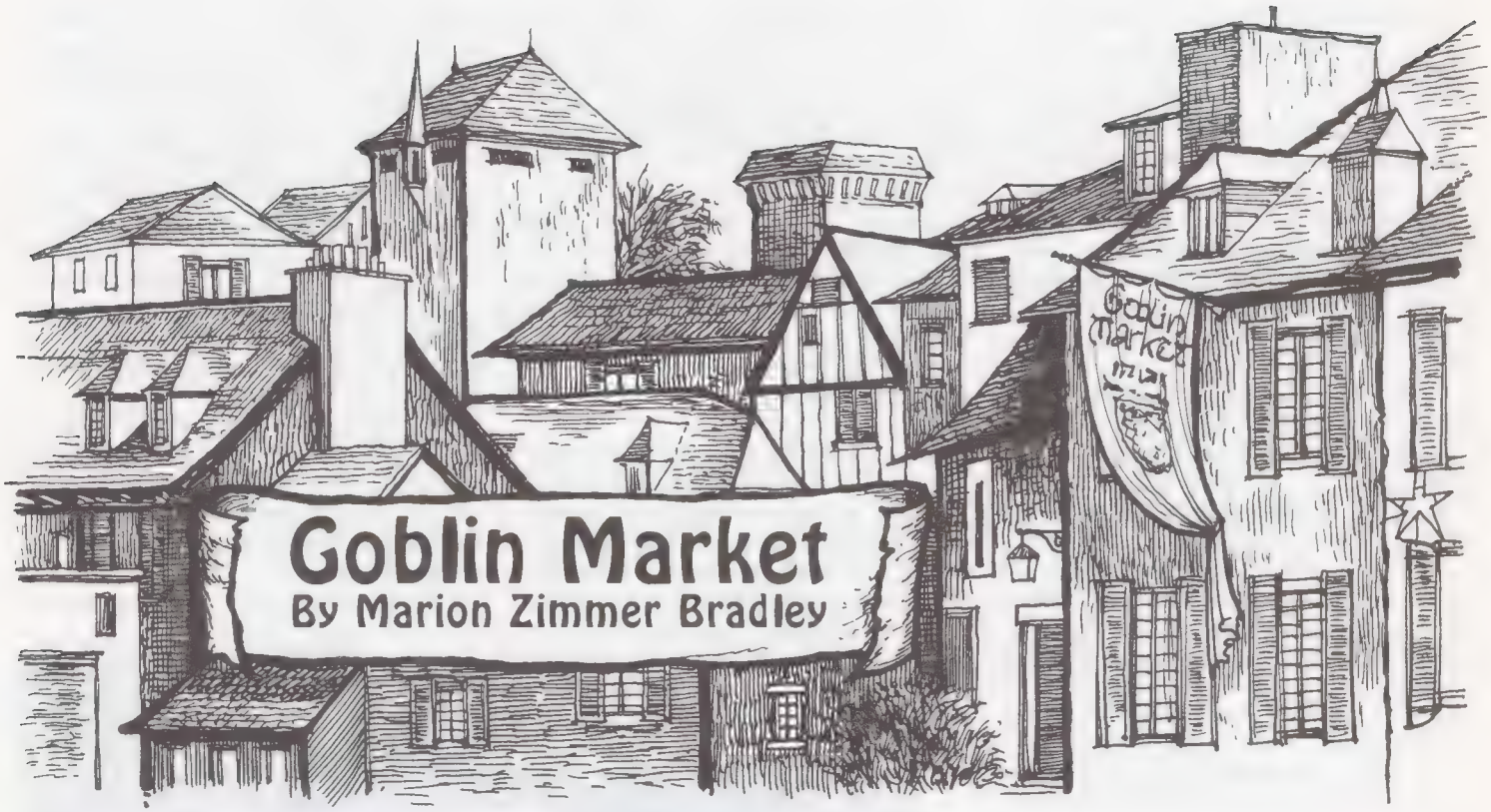


Goblin Market

By Marion Zimmer Bradley

Lythande came into the village unseen by a back road; for since her last time in that town, she had been by strange roads, which probably no one in the village would have thought of as roads at all.

As was her usual custom when she came into a strange village, she sought out an inn and commanded a bowl of wine, which of course she could not drink, for no Adept of the Blue Star might eat or drink within sight of any man. But with a bowl of wine before her, safe in the man's dress she wore, she would have a reason to stay in the tavern's warmth. She was the only woman ever to infiltrate the Order of the Blue Star, and the price she had paid for her Adepthood was that she must wear forever the disguise which she had intended only as a brief temporary expediency. She sat in the corner of the common room for a long time, half asleep — for she had been where there was little chance of sleep for many nights. After a time, an elderly villager who had just entered the tavern asked her, "Ho, master magician, be ye here for the Goblin Market?"

Lythande recalled her wandering attention and tried to rouse herself. "You still hold Goblin Markets in these parts?"

"Hey," said an old man, not too politely. "What kind of hedge wizard be ye if ye dunna' know about the Goblin Market? Dunna ye ha' goblin markets in your neck o' the woods? What sort o' Godforgotten country sha' it be, that dunna' trade wi' the goblin men for their steel knives an' swords?"

"Ho, is it so?" asked Lythande. "In my neck o' the country the goblins shew themselves only to innocent young maids and never to any man. There is even an ancient ballad about it, which I have sung all over this country — would it please your folk to hear it, lordlings and commons?"

"It would indeed," said one hearty old man with the well-fed look of a noble.

Thus encouraged, Lythande struck her harp and sang the ancient ballad. There were two sisters; one was a good maiden and minded her loom, and as as reward the ballad had little to say of her save her name; but the other was naughty and given to day-dreaming. She spied and peeped at the goblin folk, and finally ate of their sweet fruits and as reward pined almost to death. For the goblins never shewed themselves but once to any maiden; and so her good sister put a silver penny in her pocket and went forth to buy at the goblin market — and there she offered to buy. But the goblins mocked her and pressed her to eat, saying that they did not sell to fair maidens, but only gave. But she would not open her mouth, no matter how they pressed her to eat — and at last they clung round her, slapping and pinching her and thrusting their fruits upon her — but she kept her mouth tight shut, while they slapped and pinched her, attempting again and again to thrust their fruits on her physically —

"And so we have two sisters, and one was a good girl and minded her spinning wheel, and so of course the ballad —" and Lythande's bearing took on a cunning look. "I am a poor man, Excellency, and I must be out e'er it grows dark, to seek a well-sheltered haystack..."

"Innkeeper," the man interrupted, "at this hour it's unlikely you'll find a tenant for your rooms. Have you a spare chamber for this minstrel?"

"Ay', the li'l room where I ripens my winter apples. Let 'im sleep there; he's welcome to any of 'em apples. None on 'em'll be fit to eat for a month still; he's welcome, far as that goes, for them apples ain't ripe nohow, and 'e's welcome to any on 'em, if 'e dunna' fear the bellyache and gripes."

Lythande pricked up her ears. She had a ripening-spell at her command which would ripen, in the pockets of her mage-robe, as many apples as she could make away with. She wondered indeed if she should offer the spell to the innkeeper in exchange for a pocket-

Artwork by Hannah M. G. Shapero

ful of apples, but held her peace. Most likely the innkeeper would offer her only one or two apples for her spell, and she would rather fill her pockets with the green fruit. With another small spell which would conceal her depredations however many she might take.

Bending her head to the harp Lythande sang her ballad to where one sister pined near to death for the goblin fruits; for the goblins never show themselves but once to any maid — and here Lythande paused —

"I am but a poor man, Excellency, with little to sell but my ballads, and what small magic a mercenary may offer — but I offer you a spell which will keep your women and ladies and girls from the fruits of Goblin Market —"

"Na, na, na, we dunna want any o' your spells — as for the girls, their mothers ha' told them day and night to keep their eyes to themselves — ay, we lose a couple every year or so at Goblin Market, but we let them damn themselves as they will — what good is a girl who canna' mind her loom at Goblin Market — what our folk want from you, Sir Magician, is a spell for them as deals wi'the Goblin men — for they try allus' to sell us not good goblin steel, but steel charmed to kill us — not our enemies ...."

Lythande, shocked, asked "But what about the girls — don't even their mammies want them back?"

"Oh aye, but none on' us here has any brass for such foolery — what we want is a spell to make the goblins sell us good swords an' daggers — what good is a girl can't mind her loom an' goes about mooning after goblin lovers?"

So now Lythande knew why she had been sent here.

There was a force — Lythande knew it only as the Goddess — who would sometimes use her to right the wrongs of some woman or other, greatly to the destruction of Lythande's own will and plans.

This did not happen very often — it had last occurred in the episode where she had become entangled in somebody else's magic, where she had been forced to travel as a woman to return the sword of a priestess to her Goddess's shrine. But when it happened it over-rode any of Lythande's own magic. She was, to say the least, unhappy that it had happened again.

Still, she might as well get it over with. She said, "I do not know the customs of your village. At what hour do you hold your Goblin Market?"

"Oh. So, ye're going to the Goblin Market, Master Magician?" Curiosity grew in the old man's face, wrinkling it up till it looked like a withered pumpkin.

"If you will tell me at what hour it gathers." She had not been among goblin-folk for many years. "I have been travelling in far countries, and know none of your customs."

"Oh, is that so?" asked one of the men, glancing at his fellows, and Lythande wondered wearily if they would attempt to play a crude local joke on her. Well, there was nothing to do but get it over.

"They usually come in about moon-

Artwork by Hannah M. G. Shapero

rise; and it's held in that shed yonder. The goblins don't like strong sun or strong moonlight neither."

"True," Lythande murmured. She bid the tavern guests an indifferent good-evening, and wandered out, still burdened with her harp-case and travel pack, to stand in the empty cold square and watch the first goblins slipping into town. In the shelter of the huge barn, little booths and slender chairs were springing up like strange mushrooms.

Lythande had not been among goblin-folk for many years and she had forgotten much of what she knew about them. Yet she was honestly astonished to see a face she knew, belonging to a small squat goblin with bat-ears and a rounded, greying chin adorned with skimpy greying whiskers. After a time she realized that at least one of them knew her when he hailed her by name.

"Hullo, Lythande; I knew not that your kind were so long-lived! I thought that you had long-since gone to join your ancestors in whatever part of hell they inhabit!"

"Ah, Toad-kin!" replied Lythande. "I equally believed that your folk had long gone to stake out their own lands there. I had expected to find you reigning over their greatest boulevards."

"Will you take a cup of good goblin wine with me, Lythande?"

"I will," Lythande said, rejoicing that the goblin-folk were in no way men, and she could enjoy a cup of goblin wine (which she actually liked) in their company. "But none of your old tricks, Toad-kin, or I will cheerfully break every bone in your body. If you offer me anything unwholesome such as a cup of rat poison..."

The goblin's face twisted into drollness. "You have no sense of humor, Lythande?"

"About my own survival, none," Lythande answered, with cheerful brutality. A servant came bearing the goblin wine, which was delicately lemon-colored and looked delicious. Lythande picked it up and then, warned perhaps by some breath of humor in the eyes of her host, summoned power to her voice and asked, "Is this good wholesome wine?"

Held and transfixed by the magician's voice, the goblin muttered, "No."

"Which bone shall I break first, then?" Lythande asked grinning with the same cheerful brutality. The goblin winced.

"None, please," he asked in a small voice.

"Why, this is your own game, and I thought you willingly played it. Come now, let us begin," she said, "Perhaps a knee? An ankle?"

The goblin collapsed into loud blubbering wails. Horrified, Lythande regarded him in consternation.

"Why, what's this?" she asked. "Your brothers are singing — I hear them."

"You hear them? Under normal conditions, none but fair young maidens can hear them! Or is it magicians too?"

Caught right off guard, Lythande snarled, "Ware, Toad-kin, or I begin with truth on the bone-breaking! Look I to you like a fair young maiden?"

"Not like any I have ever seen," he mumbled, "but what do I know of maidens?"

"I am as far from being a fair young maid as you are from being an honest young goblin!" Lythande grumbled and hoped that the goblin was not for once telling the truth.

"Does it seem to you that I am a fair young maid?"

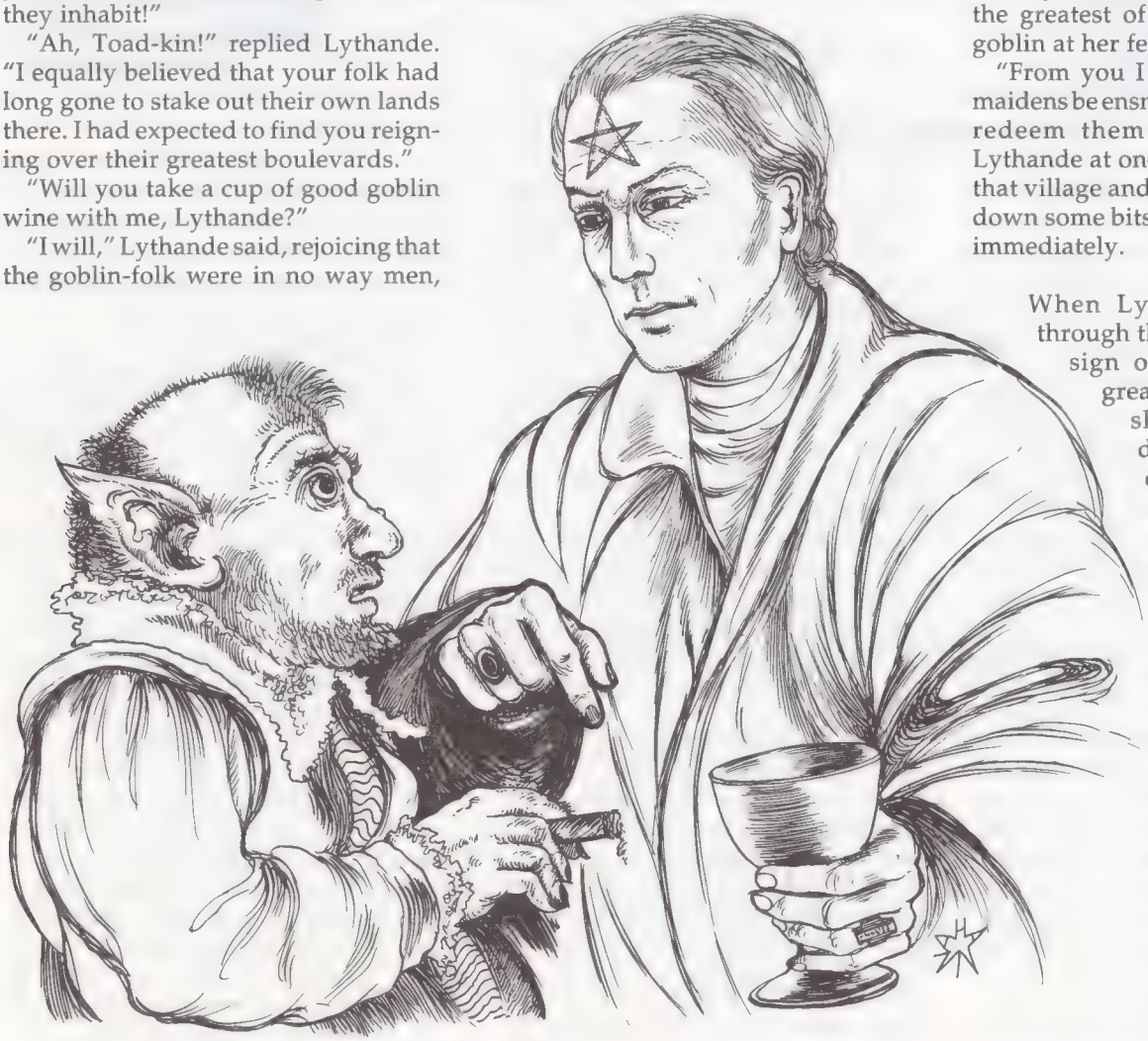
"Nay. All the world knows Lythande the greatest of magicians!" wept the goblin at her feet.

"From you I ask this in fee; if any maidens be ensnared by the goblin fruit, redeem them in my name," said Lythande at once in haste to be free of that village and the goblins. She threw down some bits of silver and departed immediately.

When Lythande passed next through the village there was no sign of any habitation: the great barn was locked and shuttered and falling down. And on the ancient wooden sign faded and decrepit, were the words:

Goblin Market
CLOSED

❄



Artwork by Hannah M. G. Shapero

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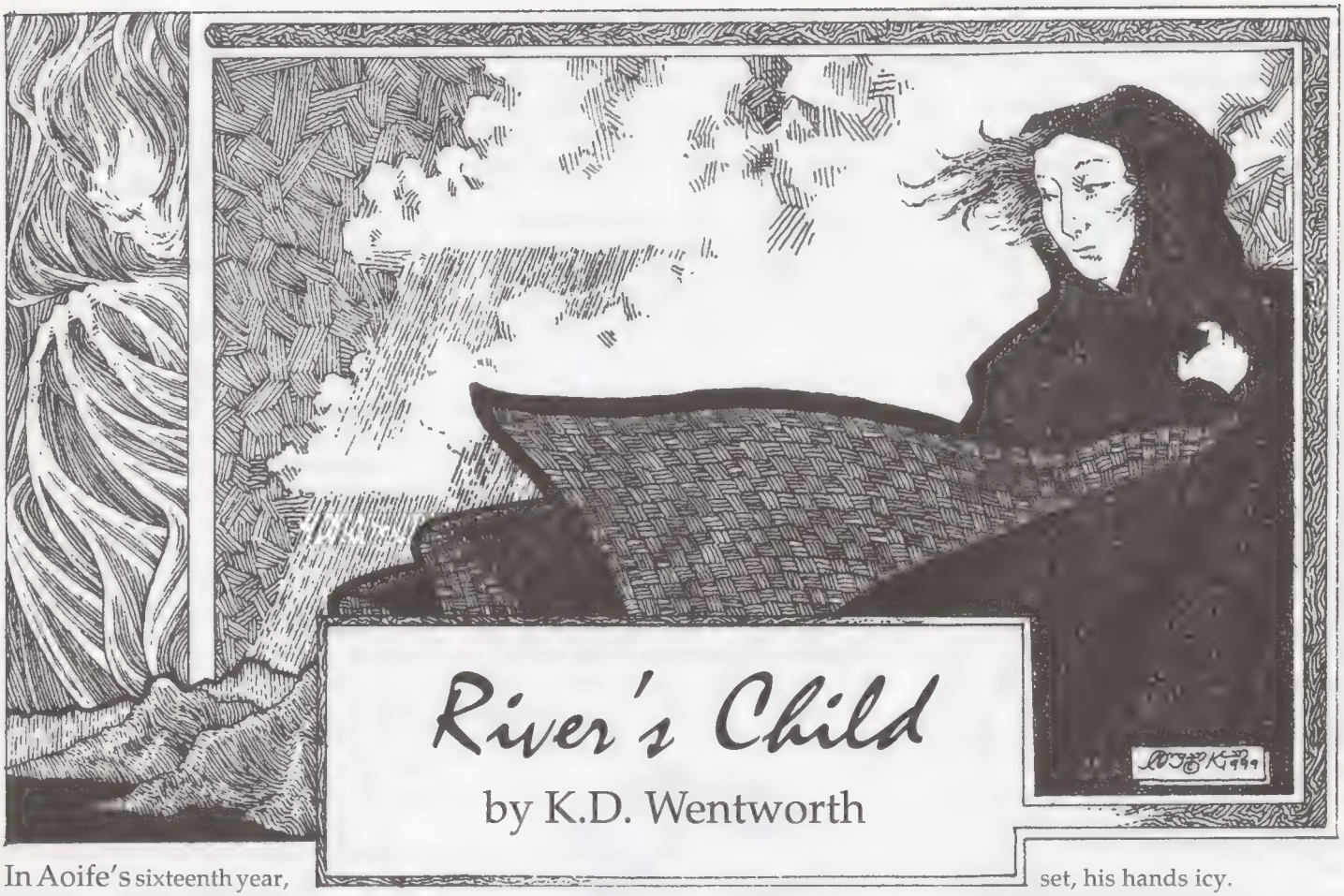
Hannah M.G. Shapero produces fantasy, sf, and commercial art. She is also an accomplished birdwatcher and gourmet cook (when not on the road, stuck in commute traffic en route to her studio).



River's Child

by K.D. Wentworth

In Aoife's sixteenth year, spring raged across County Kildare like an angry ravenous beast. Rain fell for eleven endless days and nights until swollen creeks abandoned their banks and the River Liffey ran wild. Newly plowed fields brimmed with thin black mud, so that seeds which should have been next Fall's harvest washed into the river, and then out into the restless, murmuring sea. Aoife's mother had drowned in that same river before her daughter's fourth year, but her father took a second wife, and the three of them lived in a tiny croft set high on a bluff overlooking the increasingly unruly, debris-clogged river.

Despite her father's despair over the loss of his crops, Aoife found herself fascinated with the rain. She lingered in the cottage's doorway, savoring the scent of wet earth, the musk of damp worm and soaked beetle. Her father had always called her in at the first drop, but she loved the way the rain hissed in tiny cat voices and exploded in playful showers against the saturated ground, always in such a hurry, so full of life.

The villagers, however, were not enamored. Most lived down on the flood plain, and none closer than the miller, who harnessed the water's implacable strength to ply his trade. So, on the twelfth morning of rain, the miller's youngest son, Rory, sturdy as a standing stone, appeared at their door. He removed his wet cap, then twisted it in big-knuckled hands better suited for hoisting sacks of grain. "They beg leave for the girl to come."

Aoife stood behind her stepmother in the doorway, puzzled.

Her father stepped forward, his mouth an angry slash. "No man shall take my daughter unless he courts her and makes me a decent gift, as is only fair and just. Send your own wives and daughters to the river, if you've a mind to."

Rory's deep-set blue eyes met her father's. "I have no wife, but if I did, it would do no good to send her. Your Aoife is the only one left born of that line. The river has already taken the O'Leary farm, and it not yet crested. For the sake of all the powers above, send her down before it be too late, for you know as well as the rest of us, it will have no other."

Her father closed the door, his face set, his hands icy.

"Why do they want me to go to the river, Father?" Aoife asked, for she had never been allowed to go down to it herself. He or her stepmother always fetched the water, permitting Aoife only to work at inside chores. "What good would that do?"

Her father turned away, grimness in the lines of his mouth. "It will do no good at all," he said. "Stay away from that door, and sooner or later they'll leave us in peace."

The quicksilver rain sheeted down through a twelfth night, a vast murmuring presence that pervaded her sleep. She dreamt of wearing sinuous ribbons of blue and sparkles of green, twining dark-green riverweed across her white brow, a man whose silver locks wreathed his head like a crown and who presented her with tiny pink pearls threaded on a fine chain of gold.

She woke, heart pounding, and then checked the window. The burly miller's son waited without, clothes soaked, hair in tangled strings. He clasped a leather pouch in one hand. "It wants you!" he cried, when he saw her. His face was pale as skimmed milk. "It means to drown us all unless you go!"

Artwork by Margaret Organ-Kean

Her fingers tightened on the window ledge. "What wants me?"

"The River Liffey," he said, "your birthright —"

"Get away from there!" Her father jerked her back. "Have you no shame? I'll have no more of this nonsense spouted at my own door."

"He —" Aoife hung her head, but resisted the impulse to rub her arm where his fingers had bruised. "He seems to think I can help somehow." She glanced up from the corner of her eye. "I would not mind trying, whatever it is."

He gripped her chin in one hard hand. "Would you mind dying then? 'Tis the price your mother paid!"

Her stepmother studied the young man with sharp eyes. "Did you not see the pouch? He has brought gold, and him a miller's son at that. She could wed much worse."

Aoife's heart leapt. Was the miller's son asking for her? But he was too grand to speak to a poor crofter's daughter, such as herself, and, as her stepmother had pointed out, Aoife was far too thin and pale to catch the eye of such a well-to-do lad.

"Let them send the lord of these parts himself, if they want her so badly," her father said. "We must think of ourselves now. 'Tis their homes, not ours, in danger of the river. They can do better and we can afford to wait until they do."

Aoife spun wool into thread the rest of the morning. Her foot worked the pedal to the subtle rhythm of the pelting rain so that her spinning was a joyful, restful thing. Her father sat in the farthest corner, mending harness, a somber silent presence. The cool moist air wafting through the open door was fragrant with the scent of wet hay and mud and she found herself imagining the Liffey's hungry green-brown waters. Her heart beat faster at the thought of going down there, and her blood surged like a strong current over stone.

Toward evening, a flurry of movement outside the window caught her eye. In the yard, torches hissed in the rain and voices murmured. Her stepmother looked up from the watery pot of soup simmering on the fire. "They've come back."

Aoife laid aside her spindle. "For me?"

"Of course, for you, foolish girl." Her stepmother sniffed. "And welcome they are to you, as far as I'm concerned."

Her father jerked to his feet. "Colleen!"

"She wants to go." Her stepmother put a hand to the small of her back. "Look at her. She cannot get enough of it, staring outside all the day long and then half the night too. She longs for it, and well she might. It's what she was meant for. Let her go. We'll get not one minute's peace until you do."

A man stepped forward, beautiful to behold. Aoife's breath caught in her throat, and her breast ached just to look upon him. Older than Rory, perhaps as much as five and twenty, he was dressed in a fine velvet coat the shade of cinnamon and wore magnificent boots that clung to his calves. His linen was whiter than the fleece of a newborn lamb, his eyes brown as oak.

"Farmer Brennan," he said, and his voice was deep as a well, "I have come for your daughter."

"You are not the lord," her father said.

"I am William Avery Landringham, second son to the manor. You have made known your terms, so I bear gold to pay her bride price." He pinched the bridge of his nose, as though he were in pain. "My father has a wife already, but I — am newly widowed. My lady wife drowned in the river when the bridge gave way two nights ago, our infant son in her arms. I would see that beast stopped before it takes any more lives."

Aoife rose, her hands knotted together. She — wed to the son of a lord? She could not speak for joy.

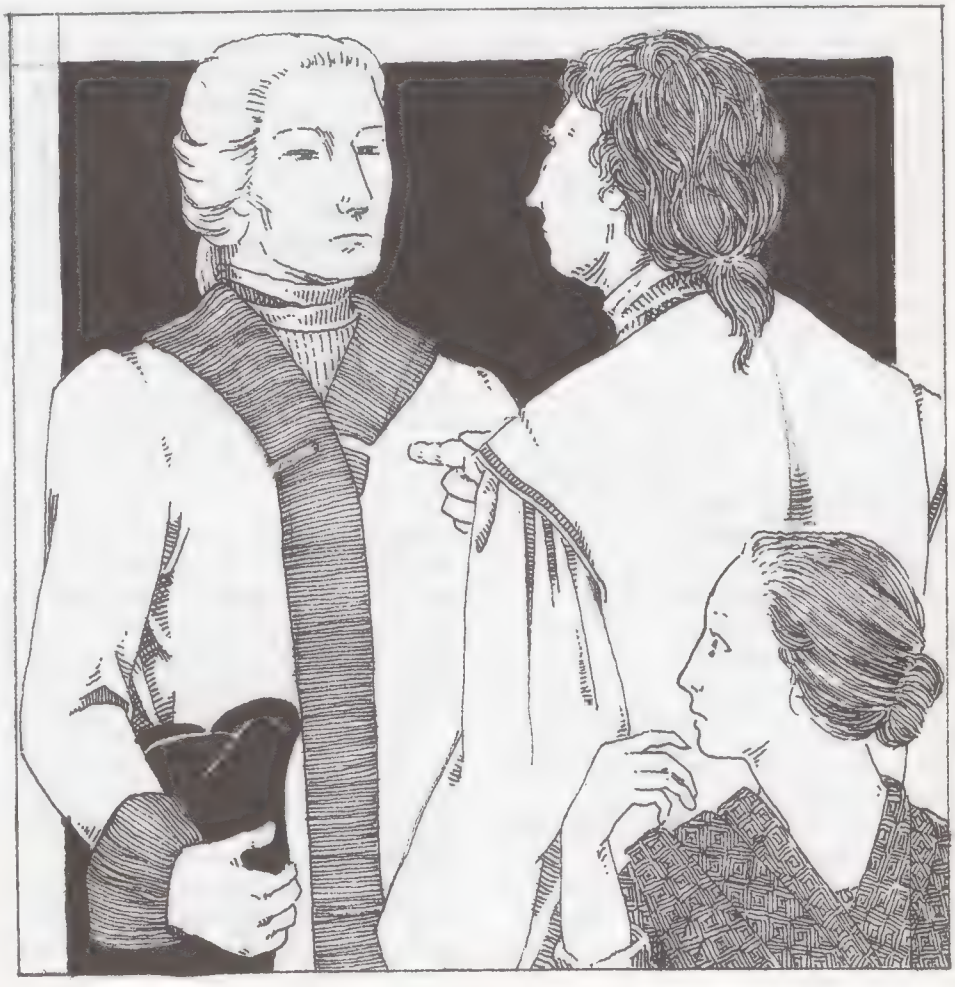
Her father scowled. "I have sworn I will take none for my daughter but the lord of these lands himself."

William's jaw clenched. "For the love of God, sir, would you have him put aside his lawful wife, my mother, then?"

Aoife's stepmother plucked at her father's patched sleeve. "Truly, you cannot ask such things, Neil. It be against the laws of Heaven itself."

"I can and I will!" He shook her off. "Leave my land and tell the lord to send no more boys in his place!"

With a look of resentment mingled with despair, the lord's son departed. Aoife's stepmother clenched her fists.



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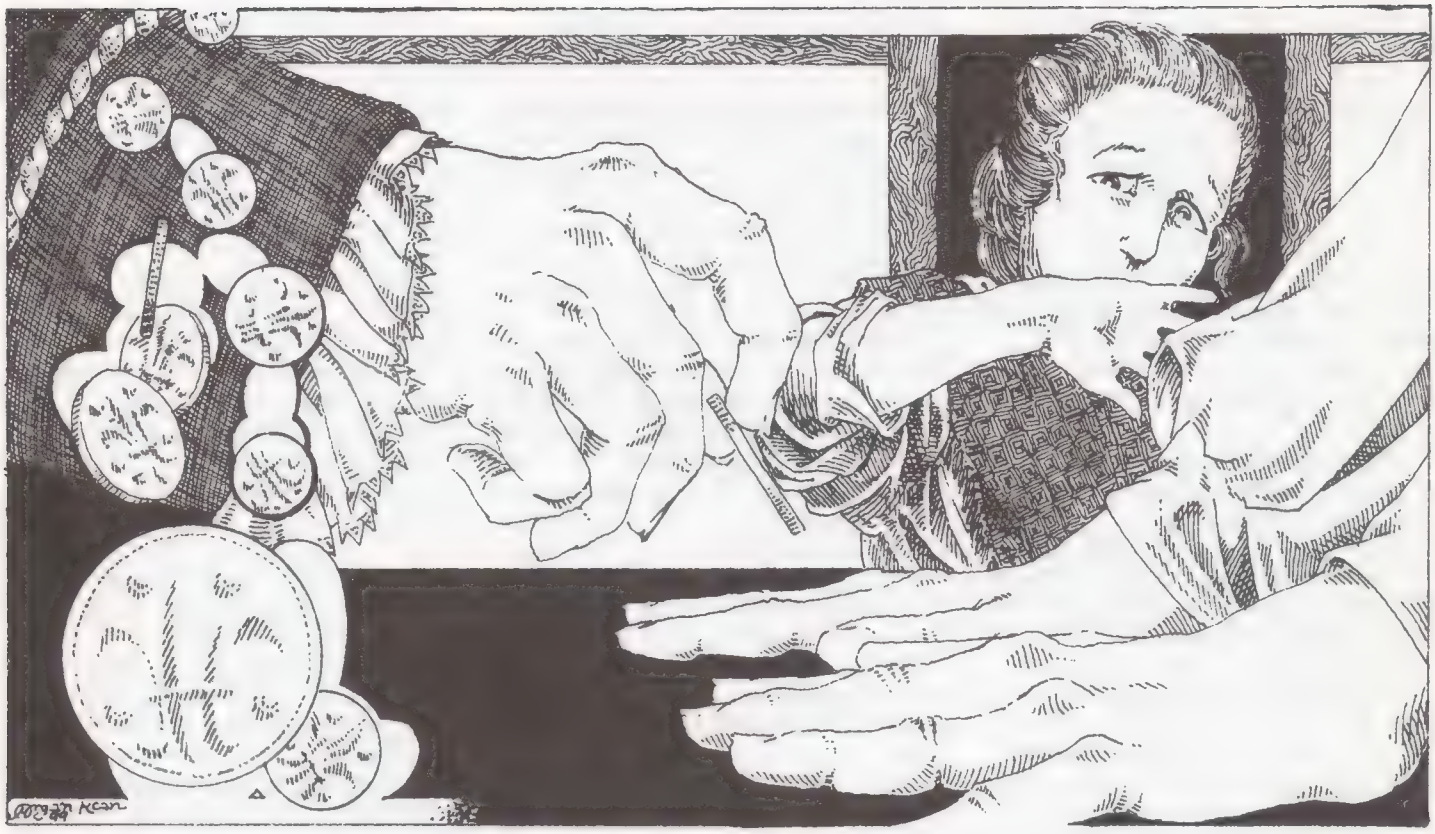

"You're a rare fool, Neil Brennan. Most lords simply take what they want and pay naught but blows in return, while this one offered lawful marriage. You should have bid the girl go."

"Yes, and let the whole country think I'm a fool?" Her father sank onto a stool before the fire and stared into the dancing flames.

The next morning, a distraught man appeared at their door, drenched gray hair clinging to his skull. "Farmer Brennan?"

Her father stepped forward, pulling up his braces. "I am Neil Brennan."

"The river took the mill last night," the man said, "and threatens the better part of the village before the setting of today's sun. In another few days, there will be no one left to pay my rents, so I have come to meet your price."

Her father's eyes gleamed. "You will marry my daughter?"

"I cannot," the lord said, "for I already possess a wife, but I've sent her back to her father's people and will pay the bride price you ask, if you surrender the girl now."

Her father moistened his lips. "She will live in your manor?"

"Yes," the lord said, "and eat at my table, rather than serve it, dress in brocade and lace as finely as my own daughters, once she subdues that ravening beast. All this, I swear."

"I will see the gold now," her father said with great dignity. "If it be sufficient, then she is yours."

The lord walked into the room and poured out his purse on the wooden table so that ten pieces of fine mellow gold clinked one against the other. Aoife backed against the rough planks of the wall. This wasn't happening. Her father would not sell his own flesh and blood to an old man who did not even want her to wife, so that she would never have a proper husband or a real home of her own. She wanted small ones to cuddle, a straight-limbed young man to take her hand and promise to make her happy —

Fingers tightened around her wrist. She flinched as her father dragged her toward the open doorway and the veil of rain beyond. "Go along with you now, Aoife. Be a good girl and do what his lordship tells ye. I'll send your things before the end of the day."

"Do not bother," the lord said. "She'll have better rags than what she's wearing to wipe her shoes when she comes to my house." He took her hand. "But first she must go to the river."

He led her out into a pelting rain, still chill with the dregs of winter, but which held an indefinable something, a minty edge, a promise, almost, of better times. She tilted her head and let the drops fall into her mouth where they tingled on her tongue like droplets of cool fire.

They descended the twisting path down to the River Liffey, which her father had never once permitted her to tread. The way was steep and treacherous, muddy, and they were going too fast for safety. She slipped, and then slipped again, catching hold of the lord's arm which he permitted without meeting her eyes.

Below, the water roiled over the banks, angry and full of flotsam, like a great dragon reaching out to devour the world. To her surprise, both the miller's son and the lord's son waited there, soaked to the skin. "Now." The lord patted her hand. "I know by your reputation that you are a good girl and doubtless have no desire to live in my house as a kept woman. Only do what you must here, and I will see you well wed to either of these fine young men, or, if you have a fancy, elsewhere."

Her heart lifted. "Gladly, sir, but I have no idea what it is you would have me do." She stared out at the powerful river as it ate away at the shore. The water surged even as she watched, wetting her bare feet.

"You must persuade the rain to stop and the river to return to its banks, or

Artwork by Margaret Organ-Kean

all will be lost."

She paled. "But how?"

"It is said that you are born to this," he said, "as your mother and her mother before her, an unbroken line back into the days when such powers were understood." He seized her hand and pulled her into the rushing water. She cried out, slipped, stumbled to her knees. The water soaked her skirt and weighed her down. She struggled free, then fell again. The water felt warmer the second time, almost welcoming. Captivated, she spread her fingers and let the current shear through them, smooth as glass, sensuous as a fine silk scarf.

The lord backed away, his linen muddy. "Bargain with it, promise it anything it wants, only bid it keep to its own banks!"

She raised bewildered eyes to his face. "I don't know how."

A slow, silvery laugh bubbled up. The water surged around her, lifted her gently and floated her out to the center of the current. *So,* a male voice said, *at last, you have come.*

"Who are you?" she asked, trembling.

Father, friend, lover, the voice said, *all of those and more. Why have you kept from me so long?*

"My father would not permit me to come," she said.

Ah, he said, *then, in the end, the man believed.*

The shore was rushing by on either side at an alarming rate, but the air was fine and brave on her cheeks and somehow she could not feel so afraid as she ought.

I studied you through the window of your dingy croft these long days of Imbolc, he said, *called for you by dancing on the roof, jigging across the fields, streaming down the lanes. I cajoled and pleaded, but you never came.*

"All this rain," she said, "was it for me then?"

My gift, he said. *Do you like it?*

She smiled, lifted her hands to the downpour. "Yes."

You are indeed my child then, he said, a note of relief in the great booming voice. *Sometimes the gift does not breed true and then there is no one for me.*

"Are there more like me?" she asked.

In other places, other times, he said, *but not since your mother came to me all those seasons ago.*

"I do not remember my mother," she said. "My father said she died coming down to the flood, in just this way."

A little rill of water splashed her face affectionately. *Foolish child, she is not dead. She chose to stay, as you may also choose, if you wish.*

"Then where is she?" Aoife craned her head.

There, he said, and she turned her head to the right toward his beckoning splash. A quicksilver form glimmered for just a second, outlined in the falling raindrops, long, swirling hair, pendulous breasts, naked thighs. A splash to her left drew her attention in that direction. *And there.*

The woman she glimpsed was beautiful, but so utterly beyond mortal flesh that she felt no rush of love, as a daughter seeing her mother's face for the first time should.

You are disappointed, the river said.

She flushed. "A bit."

She is more of my flesh than yours. Once our bargain was made, she returned to land to give you life, and then, when she could bear the ugly steaming sun no longer, she came back to me.

"I see," Aoife said, though she really didn't see at all.

Come with me, child, he said, *and then you will understand.*

Water swirled over her like a great comforting arm, carried her beneath the glossy surface before she had time to protest. It rushed into her lungs, quite as natural as air, she thought, and far more invigorating. The water beneath the river was a hundred different shades of green, from an aqua nearly the shade of blue, to green so pure and

Artwork by Margaret Organ-Kean

clear, she felt it had been distilled from life itself.

You were born to this realm, the river said, *but still you must choose, as all my children must.*

"Choose what?" she asked.

The shape of your life, he said. *The quality of your soul. Shall you live dry as those three dustballs we left standing on my banks, one step from the desiccation of the grave, or one with me, here down below?*

She turned, still descending, to see a man made of water, his face transparent and yet clearly shaped, his eyes reflective as a well, so that she saw herself when she gazed at him. Silvery locks of hair streamed about his cheeks and he stood tall and strong-thewed before her, a giant.

All the while, the river twined through her hair, caressed her neck, cheeks, arms. Her breath quickened and an unaccustomed warmth spread through her body, every inch of her body in contact with he whose realm this was. She felt her heart settle into the rhythm of the current. "How can I give you any sort of answer," she asked, "when I do not understand the question?"

You were born knowing both question and answer.

"Suppose I choose the land," she said. "What then?"

You will never bear a child, except of my loins, he said, *and will return here to lie with me each Samhain Eve.*

Artwork by Margaret Organ-Kean

She thought of the muddy banks of the river above, of the sodden fields and the terrible, unrelenting rain that would not cease, of the villagers' downtrodden faces. "And what of the people?" she asked. "If I come to you, will you keep to your banks, stop washing the seeds from the fields, and rain only that amount which is right and proper?"

No, he said. *They kept you from me all these years, when they knew how it must be in the end. I care not if they suffer now, as they cared not about me.*

"That was my father," she said. "It was none of the rest's doing. Punish him then."

They knew, the river said, *and still they did nothing, thinking I would lie quiet within my banks and take whatever insults they gave, bridges and dams, fish nets and boats. They did full measure as they pleased, as I do now.*

"I could have disobeyed my father and come to you," she said, "but I did not, so I am also to blame."

In some small degree, that is true.

"If I choose the river over dry land," she said, "what then?"

You will still never bear a child unless it be of my loins.

"Then that is no choice at all!" she cried.

Your real choice is whether to come to me now or later, he said. *Your life was laid out long before you were born. It has always been that all rivers must run to the sea.*

"I am not a river!"

But you are River's child, he said. *Lie with me now and I will show what that means.* He opened his arms.

"No!" She backed away. "I thought my father above was bad because he would only let me wed for gold, but now you say I must bear a child who will be no more free to choose her way than I am. I will not birth a child to live fettered and bound!"

The river raged so that she was swept off her feet and washed far downstream. The rocks sped by, the weeds, the startled fish. *If you do not lie with me, you will die childless. No man born of land can give you what you want.*

She seized wiry weeds growing from the river's sandy bottom and held on with all her might. "Perhaps I will not have a child, but it will be a life, and death, of my own choosing."

And the fields will rot and the crofters go

without food the whole winter long.

"They will anyway, according to you!"

What if we strike a bargain? he said. *I will return to my banks for a time and let the brassy strumpet sun hold sway again, if you willingly come to me.*

"And what of my child?" she asked. "Will you give her the power to choose, when she is of age?"

No.

The dreams of children sitting at her knee, tiny arms snug and warm around her neck, all trickled away. She saw her mother's colorless crystal eyes gazing at her without emotion, as though she were only a curiously shaped rock lodged in the sand. "I won't do it then," she said. "And, as I will never have that I desire above all other things, neither will you."

The river erupted in a waterspout of anger, flinging Aoife high into the air, arms flailing, heart pounding. She landed close to the shore with a splash and then staggered to her feet, dripping, sodden, exhausted. Lightning cracked and the rain sheeted down with renewed force, so that the ditches brimmed and the river rose even as she watched.

"I don't care!" she shouted, then waded toward the bank. "You are a great hulking bully, and I will give you nothing unless you promise to let my child choose when her time comes, *truly* choose."

The river made no answer, just roiled, as though something immense and dangerous lurked beneath the surface. She huddled shivering on the bank and watched the metallic waves gradually subside until the back of the river was again like a smooth, powerful beast running to the sea.

So full of life, she thought, so powerful, capable of such good, and yet full measure dangerous at the same time. She turned her face up to the clouds and let the rain beat on her closed eyelids, wonderful after a lifetime of being dry, shut up by a father who had obviously known enough to keep her away from the river. She wasn't going back to that sort of life either.

So come to me. The river slapped at her foot.

She scowled and edged back. "I haven't chosen yet. In fact, I may never choose." She gazed at the unfamiliar landscape, considering. "If I cannot have hearth and home and child, I may just stay here, live off the land, and do as I please."

You must choose! There was a tone of desperation in the river's voice.

"Perhaps," she said, "but not yet. Maybe not until I'm old and gray and have not a tooth in my addled old head and everyone who sees me gets out of my way and says, `There goes Mad Aoife.' I don't suppose you'll want me then."

The rain eased. The river sidled closer and toyed with the soaked hem of her skirt. *That would be a terrible waste.*

She jerked to her feet and climbed to higher ground. "What do you care? Take one of your other daughters. Take them all! I'm sure they will be glad enough to have you."

The river quieted until its waters lapped well below its former banks. *You are the last,* it said softly.

"And if I do not give you a child?"

There will be no more, and I will dance alone forever.

She pictured the river flowing dejected and unloved and her heart was touched. "Then give me what I want."

The crystal man reared up from the water until she could see his magnificent body, thigh to crown, his long hair dripping. He gazed at her mournfully. *I am River,* he said, *who rends the paltry works of men one stone from the other, who washes away fields and drives men from their homes. You are but flesh. It is for you to come to me.*

"And I am River's child," she said, "whose blood pulses in time with your current, who joys in your raindrops, and who will never be truly alive away from you, but above all other things, I want my child to choose her own way, whatever that will be."

So. He walked toward her, rising with each step, until his entire body was visible above the water. He was a man now in every respect and she could not make herself look away, for all that she, innocent of such sights, should be shamed by his nakedness. *Come then, River's child, and dance the oldest of dances. He held his massive hand out to her.*

She longed to take it up, press it to her breast and lose herself in his shimmering beauty, but hesitated. "My child?"

Shall be as free as you are this minute.

Truth rang in his voice and she knew as well as she knew her own heart that his word was good. She smiled and cast herself into his arms.

That evening, when she returned to the bottom of the bluff, barefoot, toes squishing through mud, the three of them were still waiting, as promised, the miller's son, the lord's son, and Lord Landringham himself. The river had already dropped a good foot and the glory of the setting sun was just visible between the parting, pewter-edged clouds.

Landringham studied her, as if he could see what mischief she had been up to, but she met his gaze without guile or admission. "Well, child," he said, "you have done as you were bid."

She turned and gazed out over the water, so beautiful now with the rose and gold of sunset playing across the surface. "That I have," she said, "and as long as I return each year at this time, you and yours will remain dry."

"I promised you one of these fine young men to wed," the lord said. "Which then will you have?"

She hesitated. Rory was a stout youth, with big capable hands and wondrous black hair. She thought of his head on her pillow, those hands caressing her own white skin. William was taller and fine-boned, with clear brown eyes the same lustrous shade as fine oak. He had a way of looking at her which said he was kindly, that he would treat her well and not deny her more than any man must.

She shook her head. "Neither," she said. "I am not a prize heifer to be handed over to the highest bidder."

The lord flushed. "Do you think, child, you'll be getting a better offer than either of these?"

She bent to wring the water out of her sodden skirts. "I'm sure they are both lovely, full of promises and soft words, but when I wed, if ever I do, it will be full measure of *my* choosing, and no one else's."

Then she left them standing there, ankle-deep in mud, mouths open, as she set off to find her own way down to the seething, briny sea.

❄

K. D. Wentworth has sold short fiction to *Aboriginal SF, F&SF, Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, Return to the Twilight Zone, Did You Say Chicks?!,* and *Realms of Fantasy.* She has published four novels now; **BLACK/ON/BLACK** from Baen is the most recent.

Margaret Organ-Kean works as a tech writer and systems analyst in addition to her artwork assignments from *Cricket, MZBFM,* and Wizards of the Coast.

Dear Sir

by Bob Maier

2034 Wyndhurst Rd.
Spiegeldorf, OH

Mr. Richard Magnus, President
Amalgamated Magic, Charms & Curses
1313 Wiccaway
Ipswich, CT

Dear Sir:

I was twelve years old when Granny taught me how to use magic. Right from the start she told me the most important rules were: "If you're not going to follow instructions, you got no business casting spells," and "Make your potions from scratch with quality ingredients or use a reputable brand like 'Amalgamated'."

For the entire twenty-three years since then I've been faithful to Granny's teachings. As a consequence I have little sympathy for anyone who gets hurt using cheap or stale potions. I have even less for anyone stupid enough to cast a spell without reading the directions on the side of the jar.

This brings me to my husband George, what he tried to do to my precious little puppy, PLP, and why I need to ask two questions about your products.

PLP is a sweet dog, but not so little. Her mama was a cross between a St. Bernard and a German Shepherd. Her papa was either the Great Dane from next door or the Doberman that followed Mrs. Tunney's no good son Steven home from school. But as big as PLP is, her heart is even bigger. She wouldn't hurt a flea if it was biting her and she wouldn't chase a rabbit out of the strawberry patch that grows wild behind our garage. That, according to George, was the problem.

You see, George loved fresh strawberries on vanilla ice cream. First thing he'd do when he got home from work on a late summer afternoon was have me fix him some. I'd take the ice cream out of the freezer and set it on the counter while I went out back to pick the berries. By the time I got back the ice cream'd be soft. I'd spoon some into a bowl, mix in a cup or two of fruit and George would attack it. That man ate a gallon of vanilla ice cream and a quart of strawberries every night.

The last time he asked me to fix him some was last September. I told him, "There won't be any. It's too late in the season."

He said, "You hush up and go get 'em. There was plenty out there two weeks ago when I drove by on the rider mower."

To humor him I went to look, but there weren't any and I told him so. Well he just hit the roof. He went on for about an hour and a half about how his mouth was all set for berries and ice cream and how this time he really was going to share and not eat them all himself. Then he started in about how it must've been the rabbit he saw that morning last month when he got up early enough to get to work on time. Then he turned on PLP, "How come we got rabbits runnin' all over eatin' our crops when we got a big dog like you to protect us?"

I told him to leave the dog alone but he went on raving and cursing and saying all kinds of things no decent woman would even think let alone repeat in a letter. Next day he brought home a jar of "Amalgamated Mad Dog Toner Potion". He wanted me to use it on PLP so she'd get tough with the rabbit and drive him out of our yard. I told him there weren't any more berries to protect so we might as well let PLP be her own sweet self 'til next year. I also told him using the potion then might mean buying another jar next summer. That brought him around and

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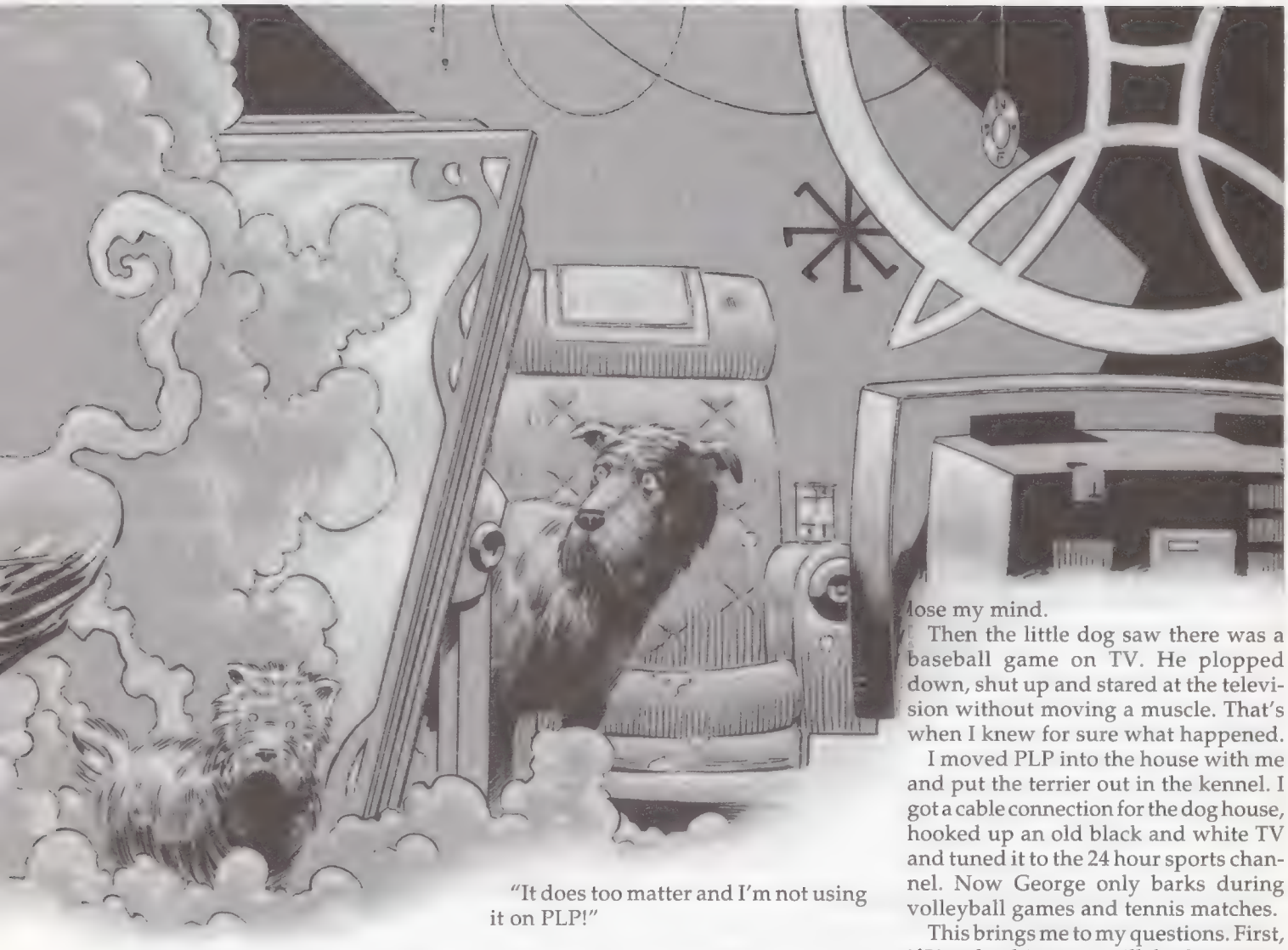


"It does too matter and I'm not using it on PLP!"

he put the spell out in the garage on that junk pile he called a workbench.

To be honest, I thought he'd forget the whole thing and that would be the end of it. But I was wrong. On a Saturday afternoon in the middle of July he came waltzing into the living room with that jar of "Mad Dog Toner". He waved it in my face and said he wanted me to dose PLP right there on the spot.

I took the jar and read the label out loud, "Store at room temperature. Use or dispose of before expiration date on bottom."

I turned to George and said, "You can't use this. It's been froze, thawed and baked since you put it out in the garage."

Then I turned the jar over and looked at the date on the bottom, "Besides, it was three months past expiration when you brought it home!"

"That stuff don't matter," he said. "They just say that to sell more potions."

He said, "Gimme that!" snatched it out of my hand and twisted off the cap. Then he started tiptoeing across the room to where the dog was sitting in front of the mirror on the closet door.

PLP knew right away something was up. She backed up against the mirror with her fur sticking up and gave a soft, low growl. George pulled back and swung the jar trying to throw the potion on PLP. She saw him coming and jumped to the side so the powder hit the mirror right on George's reflection. There was a flash, a phoomph and a cloud of orange smoke so thick I couldn't see across the room. My ears were still ringing from the explosion when I heard "yip, yip, yip," and thought, "He must'a got her."

When the smoke cleared I saw PLP standing in the kitchen doorway staring into the living room. She was looking at a little gray Terrier running around trying to catch its tail and yip, yip, yip, yipping so loud I thought I'd lose my mind.

Then the little dog saw there was a baseball game on TV. He plopped down, shut up and stared at the television without moving a muscle. That's when I knew for sure what happened.

I moved PLP into the house with me and put the terrier out in the kennel. I got a cable connection for the dog house, hooked up an old black and white TV and tuned it to the 24 hour sports channel. Now George only barks during volleyball games and tennis matches.

This brings me to my questions. First, if I just let things go, will this be permanent? Second, if I use "Amalgamated Magic Muzzle" to stop the yipping completely, is there any chance it might change him back?

Yours truly,
Mrs. Adelaide P. Tuschenberry

❄

Bob Maier lives in Southfield, Michigan , ith his wife, the Lovely Belinda, and his daughter, Rebecca the Precocious. During the day he works as a computer programmer. The story "Dear Sir" is based on his belief that one man's magic is another man's technology and one man's technology is another man's magic.

Norman Felchle graduated from the California College of Arts and Crafts in 1986. He has worked for Marvel, DC, Dark Horse Comics, SEGA, Microsoft, Novell, Mastercard, IDG Books, Industrial Light and Magic, and others.

Artwork by Norman Felchle

LETTERS

Jamie Curierre, Phoenix, AZ

I want to compliment *Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine.* There is a friendliness, a personal tone in your magazine that makes it sound like a letter from a friend. I find that refreshing and enjoyable. I think most of your readers respond to this, if the letters you publish from them is any indication. I also admire the encouragement you give for feedback, from the Cauldron, to your Web site, it is clear that you are very interested in what your readers think.

I greatly enjoyed the "Pet Peeves: Grammar I Learned in Fifth Grade" article. It is reassuring to know that there are others who care about good grammar. The one that has recently aggravated me is "there's" as in "There's three books on the table." I hear it on TV, the radio, even from my mother, who insisted on proper grammar during my entire childhood!

William C. Pierce, Southington, CT

A couple weeks ago I bought a copy of **THE BEST OF MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S FANTASY MAGAZINE, VOL. II,** an anthology collection which I found to be very enjoyable. It led me to a similar experience when I read your magazine (found at a nearby Border's Books and Music). While I'm not an incessant reader of fantasy, I've re-cycled through **THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA** and **THE HOBBIT**, to share them with the older two of my three children (the youngest has just discovered Dr. Suess and The Berenstain Bears). I have enjoyed reading fantasy and science fiction since I was a child, and find it exciting to know I can journey to fantastic worlds with my children.

Cherith Baldry, Surrey, United Kingdom

I should like to thank you and Ms. Bradley for the certificate of second prize in the Cauldron Competition for my story "Gryphon Rider", and for the cheque. It's wonderful to know that people have enjoyed my story, and I feel it's a real achievement to have been published in *Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine.*

I'd also like to thank through you the illustrator, Michael Kucharski. I've sometimes found that illustrations don't measure up to the pictures inside my head, but I like these very much, especially his concept of Heleia.

I heard recently that Ms. Bradley has been ill, so I'd like to add my good wishes, and hope that by now she is feeling better.

Leigh Husband Kimmel, Herrin, IL

I found #41 very enjoyable. It was nice to see Neko-chan return in Carol E. Leever's "Tiger, Tiger." I also enjoyed the other stories. The only one I have trouble with was Carrie Martin's "Shadders" — I would advise her to go somewhat lighter on the dialect in her next story. There is a very fine line between capturing a character's rustic speech and becoming a distraction.

The editorial features were also very good. I particularly noted Ms. Holmen's comments in "The Last Word" about copyrights. I suspect that the changing concept of copyright and the right of artistic creators to profit from their works will be as critical to the shift from the modern era to whatever follows it as the changing attitudes towards charging interest on loans was to the shift from medieval to the modern.

I've noticed that even people who fully believe that the creator of an artistic work should benefit financially are still uncomfortable with the growing extensions of copyright after an author's death. Part of it is probably the long-standing American ambivalence toward inherited wealth, with all its overtones of hereditary aristocracy. There's some simple envy — what did *she* do to deserve all that money? — but there's also some unease that unearned wealth can lead to idleness and moral decay. Not every heir of wealth will have the moral rectitude of John Ruskin, who dedicated his time and money to the betterment of humanity rather than selfish pleasure. In fact, many of the great fortunes of the Gilded Age were squandered within a generation of their builders' demise — "shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves in three generations," as my business history professor was fond of saying.

Perhaps this points back to some of Ms. Waters' comments in "Writers Talk Back" — in planning our estates, we as copyright holders need to arrange our wills such that our heirs will be protected from the temptations of idleness and debauchery that unearned wealth begets. There are ways to set up trust funds that will provide for minor children but then place restrictions on adult heirs' access so that they must exert themselves in some way, whether in the paid labor force or in charitable work, in order to obtain funds. Alternatively, one can set up a trust that will endow a scholarship or other fund for promising young writers and artists — a way of "paying forward" the help that we were given when we were starting out.

Thornton Kimes, San Francisco, CA

The "Pet Peeves" grammar patrol article inspired this letter. A "Pet Peeves II" article could be perpetrated, focusing on mis- and over-used words and phrases. One phrase, "The living rock", makes me troubled, not crazy (sort of like the "crazy, not stupid" mad bomber in ***Speed***), and appears most often in fantasy novels.

William R. Forstchen's "Lost Regiment" series is a good read (I wonder if "a good read" infuriates anyone?), but Forstchen's overuse of the word "snap" does make me crazy. I start talking to the books!

My sensitivity to such things has been enhanced by Lawrence Krauss' **THE PHYSICS OF STAR TREK**, which points out bigger mistakes than "mere" grammar. After reading Diane Duane's **INTELLIVORE**, a *Star Trek: TNG* novel, several times, I suddenly realized she repeated the "parsec" mistake from the first ***STAR WARS*** movie. She did it more than once! Even experienced authors stumble.

Jacqueline M. Shank, Pacific City, OR

Thank you for publishing my letter, and for your kind comment on it.

This is in response to Janée Rutledge of Kittery, ME: there my well be mistakes in "Caitlin's Magic" (in Issue #29), but calling Miss Fox a sorcerer is not one of them. When I shared the story with my writing group, one member remarked that a female is a sorceress. My answer to that member, and to Ms.

Rutledge, is that I deliberately used the general term. I am not entirely consistent, alas, but I try to eschew the use of feminine endings for words such as sorceress, hostess, actress, and waitress. I believe such endings are demeaning, and therefore Miss Fox is a sorcerer.

Can you bear one more grammatical pet peeve? I find it incredible that talented, clever, intelligent-in-all-other-ways writers are unable to master the use of the past tense of the verb lay. I have found such constructions as, "He lay his cane on the floor beside the bed." The past tense is laid, according to all the authorities I have found, including Strunk and White. Or perhaps the language is changing, as living languages are wont to do. Nevertheless it grates.

Barbara Rosen, Brooklyn, NY

First of all, thank you for sending me a copy of issue #41. Indeed I had not thought of my literary output as monetarily valuable and whenever I get around to making a will, I shall bring a copy of Ms. Waters' article to my lawyer.

It would have been just as easy for you to have sent only that one page; getting the whole magazine was an added treat. (I particularly enjoyed "Shadders".)

After reading all the letters you got about grammar that hurts, I thought I'd send in a couple of my own annoyances:

"The reason is because ..."

"None" (which means "not one") used in the plural: "None of them *were* ..."

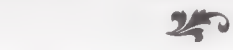
But I never expected to find a grammatical lapse in — of all places — the editorial column! You used the phrase "Only us Yankees called it that" — which, of course, should have read "Only *we* Yankees ..." The word *Yankees* is, in effect, in parenthesis: you would never have written "Only us called ..." The *us* construction would be used in the absence of a following verb: "There's nobody here but us Yankees."

It's a colloquial phrase (and actually demeaning, since the wording is intended to make the speakers seem a bit illiterate). But of course, to break the rules of grammar for effect, one must have convinced the reader that the rules were indeed ***known****. — reh*

Robin

I found that I, too, enjoyed all the stories — that is unusual for me, although I do usually enjoy the lion's share of your excellent periodical. One small thing: with the artists' part of the Cauldron, it is hard not to be prejudiced in favour of the front cover, as colour is an effective medium for art. Is it then necessary to have the front cover as an item to vote on?

Yes. The cover doesn't always win, for one thing. — reh



Darian Smith, from the Internet

Hi.

I'd like to thank everyone on the magazine for putting out such a great product and for giving new writers an opportunity in such a difficult market. I thoroughly enjoy the magazine.

That said, my curiosity has gotten the better of me. I've submitted several stories to the magazine or to the **SWORD & SORCERESS** anthology and always received the rejection slip which says my effort was "a perfectly good story, but it is not quite right..." I know this is probably one of the kindest of a variety of set paragraphs which are applied to rejected stories and I'd be interested to know what the others are. It would be comforting, at least, to see the other possible rejection slips and say "I'm glad mine wasn't turned down because of this, that or this." Hypothetically, if a story were to be rejected on every single count and get all of the set rejection slip paragraphs, how would that letter read?

Thanks for indulging me. I'm sure there are many others out there who have submitted who would be interested in this as well.

Some of the reasons would cancel each other out, so no single story could receive every rejection. Marion's excellent column "Why Was My Story Rejected?" is on our website, and offers a fairly comprehensive list of reasons. — reh

Laura J. Underwood, Knoxville, TN

Well, folks, you did it again. Having greedily sucked down this issue of *MZBFM's*, I am now sending you my votes in the Cauldron.

Keep up the good work. I'll look forward to the next issue.

Thank you, ma'am. — reh

William A. Levinson, Wilkes-Barre, PA

In "Sex and Bad Language" (Issue 43), you mentioned a story that began, "She wore the typical Amazon's costume of three strips of soft white leather." I can imagine a comic relief scene in which George S. Patton Jr. gets sent back in time and meets this Amazon: "So you call yourself a warrior? What kind of uniform is that? Where's your helmet?"

Patton would have gotten along with C. L. Moore's Jirel of Joiry, since her panoply included the headpiece. The helmet is often absent in sword and sorcery films, despite the fact that it's the most important piece of armor. The head is harder to protect than the body, and it's far more vulnerable. Excavation of one medieval battlefield (Wisby, 1361) showed that forty-four percent of fatalities were from head wounds — and medieval combatants usually had helmets. Good head protection, as well as training and discipline, gave Roman legionaries a major advantage over barbarians who fought bare-headed. The mask is the principal target in sabre fencing, and so on.

There's a partial explanation for the absence of helmets in movies. An actor cannot wear a face-covering helmet and project his or her voice properly, but producers have found ways around this. In ***Alexander the Great***, Richard Burton wears a hinged helmet that he closes for combat scenes and opens when he has to speak. In Sergei Eisenstein's ***Alexander Nevsky***, the hero's visor covers his eyes but not his mouth. In ***Star Wars***, James Earl Jones supplies Darth Vader's voice while David Prowse wears the costume. In ***Excalibur***, though, the knights tear off their helmets to deliver their lines — in the middle of battles! I found this somewhat disconcerting, since being unhelmed was a major disadvantage.

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An Interview With Josepha Sherman

by Darrell Schweitzer

Photo by N. E. Photo and Design

MZBFM: Start out with the beginnings of your career, where you came from. Were you found in a basket among the reeds in the Nile ... ?

No, that's been done. I started out as a child ... Actually, I started out to become an archeologist and worked at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the Ancient Near East Department until it became clear that the only way you can advance in a museum is by killing the person ahead of you. I had started doing artwork by that point and thought, foolish me, that I could support myself doing artwork. Then I realized that what I really wanted to do was write. At the same time I got interested in folklore, so I am now a fantasy writer, *Star Trek* writer, *Xena* writer, folklorist, storyteller, and friend to horses.

If you combine all those things ...

If I combine all those things I wind up talking about flying telepathic horses ... no, I don't want to go there.

Have you considered the anthology possibilities? How about a book called ***ALTERNATE HISTORICAL FLYING TELEPATHIC HORSES ?***

That's truly frightening. There might be some publisher who'd buy it ... Ahem. Moving right along.

Moving right along, you also became an editor.

Actually, I backed into becoming an editor. I needed something to support me. Don't quit your day job, boys and girls. You cannot live off your writing alone, at least not at first. So I was taking freelance editorial jobs. My first one happened to be with Jean Karl, who founded Atheneum/Argo Books, the imprint that published such little-known people as Ursula K. LeGuin, Anne McCaffrey, and Patricia McKillip, and now is no longer because the powers that be have decided that fantasy doesn't sell.

So when Jean Karl found out that I actually read fantasy, I started doing freelance editorial work for her and the rest is history. I was consulting editor for Baen Books for about ten years and now am freelance completely, writing, as a folklorist, and editing.

How did being an editor influence your writing?

It gave me a better idea of what makes a good story and what doesn't. You know; you've done some editing yourself.

Did you read novel slushpiles?

Oh, yes. I went through eight thousand manuscripts a year, and of those eight thousand, I'd say ninety percent were purely mediocre, and of the remaining ten percent that were worth saving, some were really good, and some were so bad they were cherished. I don't think I can legally quote any of the latter.

Reading novel slushpiles seems like a very formidable occupation to me, like chiselling away mountains to find the possibLeGem inside.

Question from audience: Did you read the whole book each time?

No. I would read the first chapter. If the first chapter looked like it might be in English, but really wasn't going anywhere, then I'd look at the second and third chapters. If it didn't work after that, I might look at the end and then say, "Thank you, but this isn't for us."

But there are first-time novelists for have gone on to bigger and better careers. Doranna Durgin's first novel, **DUN LADY'S JESS**, came in over the transom. C. Dale Brittain — that's a pseudonym because she's a professor at a university that doesn't like people writing fantasy — her first novel, her first submission, **A BAD SPELL IN YURT**, went on to become a bestseller.

Had you sold novels before you became an editor?

No, I was an editor first. The first novel was the usual trunk novel, but I did rewrite it later and get it published, as **KING'S SON, MAGIC'S SON**. The first novel I actually sold was **THE SHINING FALCON**, and that won the Compton Crook Award in 1990. That was definitely while I was still an editor.

Who published it?

Avon.

So there was no temptation to offer it to the people you were editing for?

Not at the time. Though later on they did buy books from me.

Had you written short fiction before that?

To give you an idea of how naive I was at the time, my first sale was to a small-press magazine, *Space and Time*. I got a letter from them, opened up, a check fell out, and my first thought was, "What's that for?" Then I read the letter and thought, "Oh, cool ..."

My second sale was to *Highlights for Children*, but that's a different story. No pun intended.

What I was thinking of by bringing this up is what I'd call the coward's approach to novel-writing, which is that you don't attempt a novel until you're are selling short fiction, and thus have proven that you can write at a publishable level.

There are two schools of thought on that. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. C. Dale Brittain, whom I men-

tioned before, had never written any short fiction. I had written short fiction before I wrote any novels. I think it depends on the person, what type of story they have in them.

It's also a matter of how much stamina they have.

Oh, yes. And how much courage.

The reason I call it the coward's approach to writing is that, now that I am doing some agenting, I am beginning to see something like a novel slushpile. I find it extremely dismaying to encounter a huge manuscript, maybe even a trilogy, over which the author has clearly labored for years, and I can tell within five pages that it's completely unpublishable, because the author can't construct a scene or doesn't know point of view or just doesn't use language very well. It's an enormous labor of love, which may have consumed a substantial portion of the writer's life, and it's all for nothing.

I really, truly wanted to send out a rejection letter that said, "Have you considered ceramics as a hobby?"

My point being that you can as readily make these mistakes in ten pages as in six hundred, so you might as well be bad at short length until you learn better.

Writing is the only profession where people think you don't need any prior experience. You would never think about becoming a doctor without going to medical school. But there are people who think they can become writers without ever having read a book.

As a teacher, I've met some of those ...

I got one cover letter from a man who boasted he hadn't read a book in twenty years.

Maybe he had a really good early education.

Not good enough, especially in today's market. Shall we depress everybody? Today's market is, in a word, terrible. We have imploding publishers. We have diminishing lists. The midlist authors — that's everyone who isn't Stephen King, basically — are being squeezed out. You need a tougher hide than ever if you're going to make it as a writer. If you can be discouraged, maybe you should look at some other profession. It is not an easy way to make a living. It never has been, but it's tougher now than it ever was.

There are still opportunities, particular in short fiction. For example, my advice to horror writers right now is to shelve your novel, write short fiction, and wait for better times.

Well, the horror market got over-bought.

Then collapsed totally. But there are still magazines that publish short fiction. And there are more anthologies than there used to be, and a lot of them are open.

*So, what about **ALTERNATE HISTORICAL LEVITATING HORSES**?*

[Laughs] I've had my turn in the barrel, dear boy. I've already edited a couple of anthologies. The latest one was with Keith DeCandido, **URBAN NIGHTMARES**. A little side-story: most anthologies these days seem to start at conventions, in bars, where everybody is sitting around saying, "Gee, what if —?"

That's how this one started. The writers take urban legends — the hook, alligators in the sewers, etc. — and develop them as original stories. Rob Sawyer tells us exactly what the alligators in the sewers are. They ain't alligators. If you've read his dinosaur books I'm giving something away here ...

So I've edited a couple of anthologies. You don't do it for money. You know that. It's fun. It's entertaining. I don't do open anthologies. Open anthologies mean you get thousands of submissions. I usually solicit stories from writers whose work I know, who will fit into the anthology. But there are open anthologies, like Marion Zimmer Bradley's **SWORD AND SORCERESS** series.

*Then there are the more specialized anthologies. I've always felt the ultimate would be **ALTERNATE HISTORICAL VAMPIRE CATS**.*

There was one called **DANGEROUS VEGETABLES**, so anything is possible.

*Not to mention the sequels, **AGAIN, DANGEROUS VEGETABLES** and ... **SALAD**.*

No, **PEAS AT LAST**.

[A pause.]

Hi.

Moving right along, let's talk about folklore a bit, how you research it and use it.

Fantasy and folklore, of course, are very closely related, even more closely than fantasy and science fiction, because fantasy uses the same archetypes. Fantasy is very closely related to the quest to the they-lived-happily-ever-after, and so on.

I'll give you a test right now. What character, as a baby, was put in a boat and cast away for his own protection, was raised not knowing his true origins, and went on to become the savior of his people?

Several ... Superman.

Very good!

Moses, Superman ... They didn't put King Arthur in a boat, but he too was raised apart without knowing his true identity. Such peopLeGet a coupon in the mail later in life which says, "You are a hero."

[Laughs.] ***WILLOW***, George Lucas's movie, uses the theme. Of course Lucas in that movie was hitting us over the head with the archetype.

Anyhow, I use folklore a lot in my own novels, primarily because I'm a folklorist and I'm familiar with it. But also because its themes are fascinating. Do you know how many versions of "Cinderella" have been collected around the world? As of the moment, seven hundred and twenty.

And there's probably a version up the Amazon or in Nepal that nobody has taken down yet.

Don't bet on it.

And as the stories pass into literature, they get cleaned up a little bit.

The Brothers Grimm to you too. They were writing for publication. The earliest editions were the closest to what

they gathered, and no, they did not gather them in Germany; they gathered them in Alsace-Lorraine. The earliest editions, as I say, were the most authentic. Then they started rewriting for publication. As they rewrote for publication, the stories got bloodier. The earliest might say, "The stick hit him." The later editions might say, "and the bruises formed and the blood ran down," and so on. They also took away the roles of women in the stories. In the earlier versions the women are doing things and saying things. In the later versions the women either become bad girls or passive figures with no voice. The Grimms were writing in a time when this was the approved literary standard.

Also there were market forces at work. They had to sell these things as children's books.

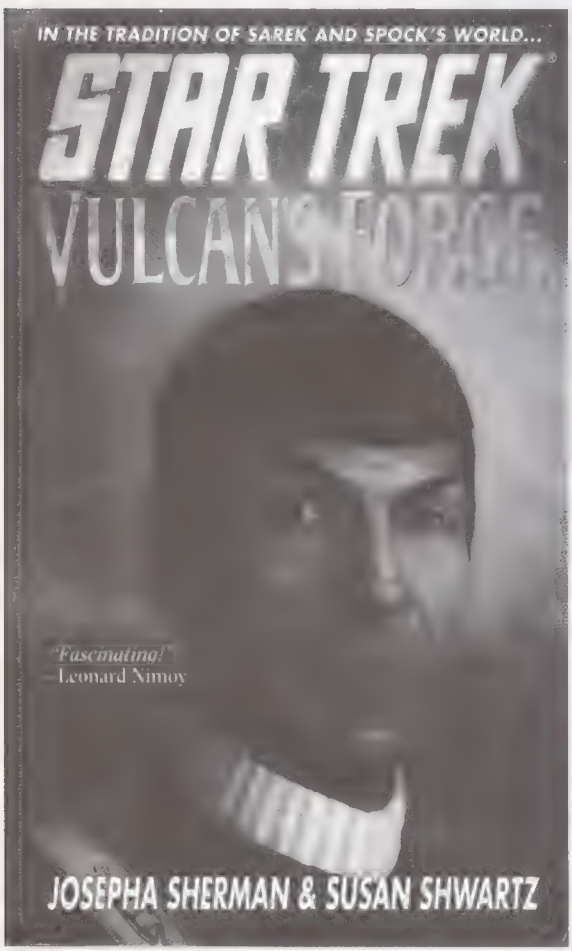
I don't know if they were aware of that at first, but they were aware that there was a market for heavy-duty, dark, romantic, German fantasy. By that point, that was 1840 or so.

At precisely the point where Edgar Allan Poe said that horror was not of Germany, but of the soul.

They were very well-named.

Morticia Addams said that once, "What a lovely name, Grimm." Well, there is a lot of grim stuff in fairy-tales, for all they were meant for the nursery —

No. Folklore was never for the nursery. That's a big mistake we make in this country. Folklore was the entertainment of the folk. This was what people were doing before radio, television, movies. They were sitting around telling each other stories. Folklore is not clean. It's not pretty. It's not nice. It's not tidy. It was meant for adults. It's adult entertainment in every sense of the word. We have a lot to blame Mr. Disney for. His Cinderella was a little wimp. The mice have to help her. In most of the Cinderella stories around the world she's a strong character who sets out to find her own destiny and her own fortune. And there are a lot of really sexy folktales that are left out of most editions. When Vance Randolph was collecting his folklore — Manly Wade Wellman went with him on a lot of his collecting trips — he had some very funny, dirty folktales collected in the Appalachian Mountains. He was not allowed to publish them. They were published later in separate anthologies, because, Oh my God, folklore couldn't have *S*E*X* in it. The same thing happened in England.



Or, there are some things in the Burton Arabian Nights which are not in the children's version.

Well, that's putting it mildly. As I say, they were not meant for children.

Remember the story of Abu Hassan? I suppose it's completely universal in its basic gag. [At this point the conversation becomes extremely indelicate, as Schweitzer retells the story of Abu Hassan's indiscretion with somewhat less flair than either Burton or Scheherazade ...] I mean, the frustration gag, that the thing you're trying to live down gets put into the calendar. They name a year after it.

There was a reason why the Irish kings feared the bards, because a well-written satire is forever. It was said a bard could sing a man to death. Yes, he could sing his reputation to death. You know those jingles that stay in your head forever? Imagine one that says the king is no good, the king is a cheat, the king is a liar, and it's to a nice jingly tune you can't forget. He'd better move to another country.

Like "Rock-a-Bye Baby" ...

There are two theories on that. One is that it's a mother's revenge rhyme. Think about the words.

I'd always thought it was about Charles II in the tree. He lost a battle to Cromwell and had to hide in a tree. Therefore this is a Puritan song, making fun of him.

It also could be the mother who's fed up to here — "rock-a-bye baby in the tree top ... down will come baby, cradle and all — hallelujah, I'm free of him!" You can look at it any way you want, but it's not a very nice song.

You can look at it any way you want. I suppose one of the fun things about using folklore in fiction is that you can make up "folklore" of your own and present it absolutely straight, so people think the story is based on some ancient folk-belief that you happened to have made up.

As long as you do it in fiction. The minute you say it's genuine folklore when it's not, it's called "fakelore," and folklorists will burn you at the stake.

Have you ever made up seeming folklore in fiction?

I did it in **SON OF DARKNESS**. It's a dark, urban fantasy novel I wrote for Roc. It's set in modern New York City. The museum there is the American Museum of Art. It is not the Metropolitan Museum of Art, even though it occupies the same space exactly and has the same layout. But the hero, let's just say, is tall, handsome, fair-skinned, wears sunglasses and is not a vampire.

What a revolutionary idea.

He's of the dark side of Faerie. Now some of that is genuine lore. Some of it is my extrapolation, and I defy you to tell which is which.

I've also enjoyed quoting imaginary verses of real folksongs — in fiction, mind you — and I even quoted a fake passage from "The Long Lost Friend." I'm working up to imaginary verses from the Bible.

You're going to be so popular in some places ... Now what shall we talk about?

We could complain about publishing. It's traditional to do so.

There's a little thing called the Thor Power Tool Ruling, whereby a publisher is penalized for keeping books in the warehouse. So the publisher does not want to get penalized for tax purposes. That's why you don't have a backlist. You don't have books staying in print very long. The publisher doesn't want to have books in the warehouse because they get taxed.

It's also because a reprint doesn't (theoretically) sell as well as a hot new title, and therefore the buyers for the big bookstore chains only want hot new titles. If you offer them reprints, they're not interested. This is dragging publishing around by the nose.

[Laughs]: That's putting it mildly.

I've always had a great faith in the small press. It's a great publishing opportunity out there. If you've got about five thousand dollars you can afford to lose ...

Five thousand? More than that.

I know one publisher who says he can turn out a thousand copies for $1400.00. The effect, anyway, is that the entire backlist of science fiction and fantasy is available for almost nothing. You could get rights to reprint award-winning, classic novels and not even have to pay an advance.

E. E. Doc Smith, one of the fathers of space opera, was out of print until a small press reprinted him this past year. Nobody even thought about it.

I was doing freelance for Walker and Company. They had the rights to **THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS** by Ursula K. LeGuin and didn't know it. Nobody had thought to look it up. I came across it by accident in the file and said, "Oh my God ... Folks, do you realize what you've got here?" They did a 25th anniversary edition. How well it did, because of what you're saying about reprints, is another story.

Let me be optimistic for a moment. The publisher of Doc Smith, Mike Walsh of Old Earth Books, is, I gather, doing very well by the Lensman series. He's very happy. I overheard a fan profusely thanking Walsh for doing this reprint, and he said, "As long as the New York publisher's aren't doing their jobs, I'm here."

It's good that somebody is keeping the classics in print. Do you know how many kids out there don't read any of the older books? They don't even know who Jules Verne is except from the movies. They don't know who H. G. Wells is except from the movies. They certainly haven't read Doc Smith. They know ***STAR WARS*** or anything that's in the movies or on TV, but they don't know the older books because they can't find them.

More seriously, there are would-be fantasy writers out there who have never read Lord Dunsany or James Branch Cabell.

I'll top that.

We won't mention any names, but they think that a certain modern best-selling writer invented it all.

I won't mention any names, but this particular writer is quite well-known for a certain series — and it's not Robert Jordan or David Eddings. Many people think that Tolkien ripped this other writer off.

There are some older books still available.

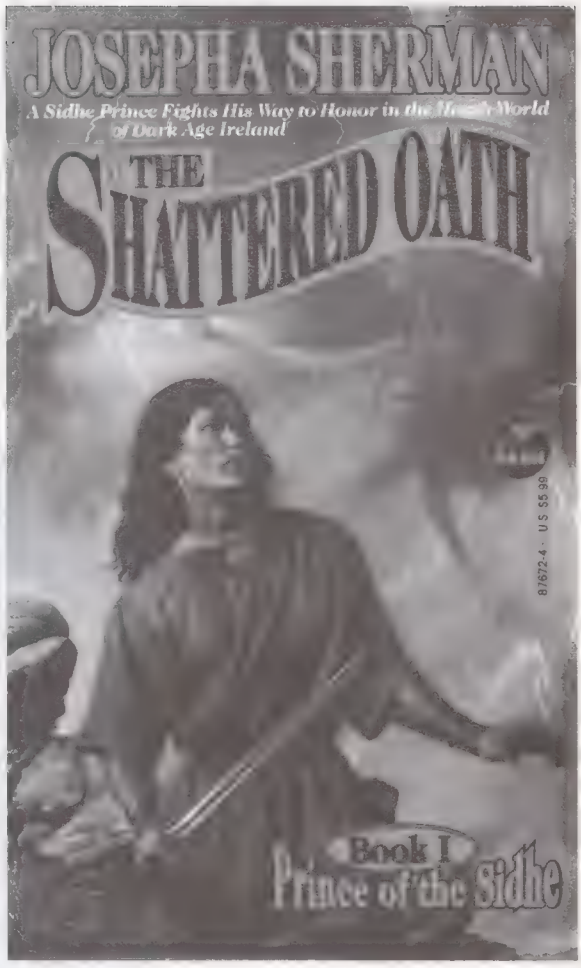
Baen Books did reprint Robert E. Howard recently. I don't know if the books actually sold.

If people keep going into the bookstores and demanding classics —

That's the thing. People are not buying books the way they used to. Sales figures are way down.

The sales figures for the United States would be quite impressive for a country with the population of, say, Liechtenstein.

[Laughs] Ten per cent of the American population buys books.


JOSEPHA SHERMAN
A Sidhe Prince Fights His Way to Honor in the Harsh World of Dark Age Ireland
THE SHATTERED OATH
Book I
Prince of the Sidhe

This leads me to one of my own harangues, which is that if we're writing fantasy and we want it to be any good, this is inherently an elitist occupation. We might as well admit it and not worry about the broad masses being unable to understand what we're doing, because the broad masses don't read anyway.

The minute you worry about the readership, you're never going to be a writer. You'll be too afraid of what the public will think. The other trick is, don't write what you think the public will want. Write what you want to write. The minute something like ***STAR WARS*** comes out, there are going to be so many copycat manuscripts coming in. There is only so much room for ***STAR WARS*** ripoffs.

Besides which, the really canny ripoffs were written two years ago, and are already in the process of being published.

That's right.

The ones that are submitted after the next **STAR WARS** *movie comes out are too late.*

When ***DARK CRYSTAL*** came out, for about a year there were manuscript after manuscript about strange little creatures and crystals — wow! How original!

Of course every editor has stories like this.

That's why every editor keeps a funny file.

Tell the folks what a funny file is.

A funny file. That's the slush that's too wonderfully bad to throw away. Copies get made and kept in secret files and not shared with the public except with the names carefully taken off. Anybody who reads science fiction and fantasy or goes to conventions doesn't have to be afraid of hearing their own work read aloud from a funny file, because nobody else can write as badly as these people.

We can encourage the good writers out there by the following argument: When you hear that one story in a thousand gets

published, that does not mean that it's a lottery, that the writer has a one-in-a-thousand chance of getting into print. No, the editor has a one-in-a-thousand chance of opening an envelope at random and finding something good enough to print, which is another matter entirely. Probably of those thousand, there may be ten that could be published. For those ten alone, matters of taste and editorial policy and even chance — such as the editor having another story on the same topic — actually come into play.

Would you agree?

There's also the law of serendipity, which is the manuscript that comes in at just the right time, at the right length, with the right subject. It's just what you need. But there's also the law of synchronicity, which is that you've just published a book about left-handed, telepathic monkeys, and someone else sends in a book about left-handed telepathic monkeys. You can't use two books on the same subject. It's the luck of the draw. Do you remember ***THE TOWERING INFERNO***? The movie. That was two separate books that came out at the same time, by pure coincidence. The two were combined to make the screenplay, which probably doesn't happen very often.

That was probably done to avoid getting sued by the author of whichever one wasn't used.

Yes.

The one advantage the magazine editor has over the book editor is that if the magazine receives three good stories about left-handed telepathic monkeys, the editor can buy them all and just schedule them far apart.

The advantage is that if it's a monthly he has to fill that magazine every month no matter what, so the writer has more of a chance with a magazine. The disadvantage is that if the editor needs to fill a hole quickly, he or she is going to turn to a pro first, because he or she knows the pro can produce a good story fitting such and such a theme.

Very few magazine editors I know run their inventory that low. It's always best to have about three issues' worth in the drawer.

They try not to. Accidents happen. It can if a magazine gets bought by another publisher.

What you do in a hurry is buy first North American rights to something that's appeared in a British magazine, but not in the US.

One advantage that children's magazines have, if they don't buy all rights — *Cricket* buys just First North American serial rights, which means the author owns all the other rights. I sold one story to *Cricket* and since have made $3000 in subsidiary sales to different markets around the world. Those are lovely. *Cricket* pays twenty-five cents a word.

You made $3000 for a 1200-word story. Many novels don't do that well.

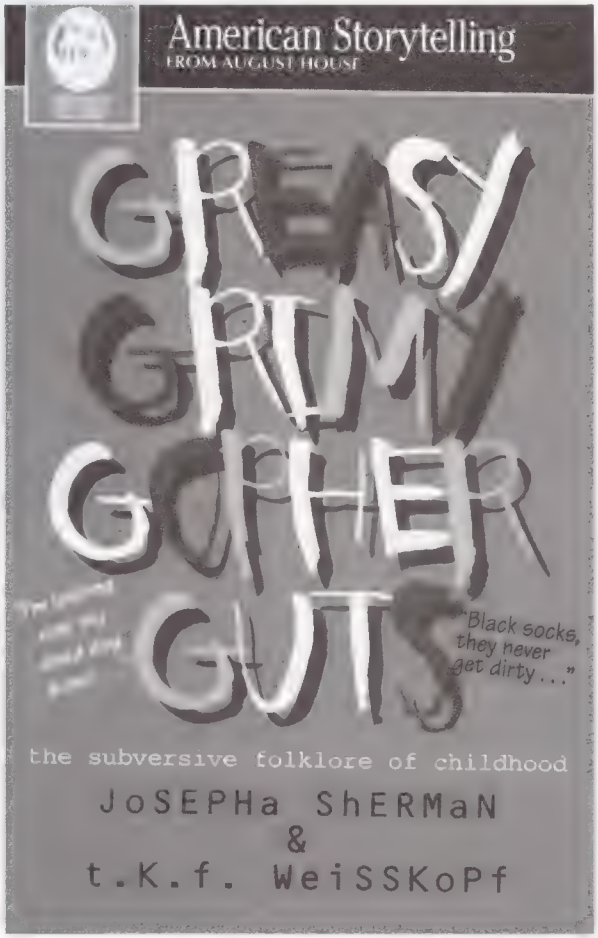
The worst thing that ever happened to publishing was that the MBA's got in and pushed the book people out. They're trying to run publishing as if it were any other business. It's not. It can't be. You cannot compare a novel to crates of nails. Crates of nails are going to be the same from one box to the next. Novels are not.

Does this give you any hope that eventually the small press will take away a substantial portion of the market?

I'm hoping there will be more small presses. Because of all the mergers, there will be room for new publishers to start up and new distributors to get into the game.

Maybe online distribution?

Who knows? Nobody knows yet what electronic rights are going to mean.



Let me guess. I suspect that actual electronic books and magazines will come to very little. Websites are like catalogues or billboards. As a medium for advertising, they have enormous potential. I'm thinking of Amazon.com.

I have a website which is linked to Amazon, and I've made money that way, because if anybody goes through my website and buys a book from Amazon, I get a royalty from Amazon. I rather like that idea.

I've met very few writers who are allergic to money.

Hey ...? Amazon is a funny bird because nobody knows yet, is it going to make me profitable or not?

What are you writing now?

Right now I have just finished my second *Star Trek* novel with Susan Shwartz, **VULCAN'S HEART**, a sequel to **VULCAN'S FORGE** —an d no, there will not be a **VULCAN'S LIVER** and **VULCAN'S BIG TOE**. About **VULCAN'S HEART**, I will say only it is the first R-rated *Star Trek* novel and that our first *Star Trek* novel was the only *Star Trek* book ever to get a starred review from *Publisher's Weekly*. So, for those of you who think don't like *Star Trek* novels, try ours. They are science-fiction novels that happen to be about *Star Trek*. Because publishing is an incestuous business, I have co-written with Laura Ann Gilman, my editor on **SON OF DARKNESS**, a *Buffy* novel, **VISITORS**, because we are both big *Buffy* fans and we thought it would be a hoot to write, and it was.

Do you find this kind of writing to be as satisfying as writing your own material?

Financially, yes. Leave it at that. I enjoy playing with *Star Trek*. It is basically space-opera. We're writing in eras that haven't been touched by the series. So we're freer to do original stories. It's not as constraining.

I'm also working on folklore. I have a new folklore book out, **MERLIN'S KIN: WORLD TALE OF THE HEROIC**

MAGICIAN. That's from August House, a small press, my folklore publisher.

*Did they also do, one of the great titles, your **GREASY, GRIMY GOPHER GUTS**?*

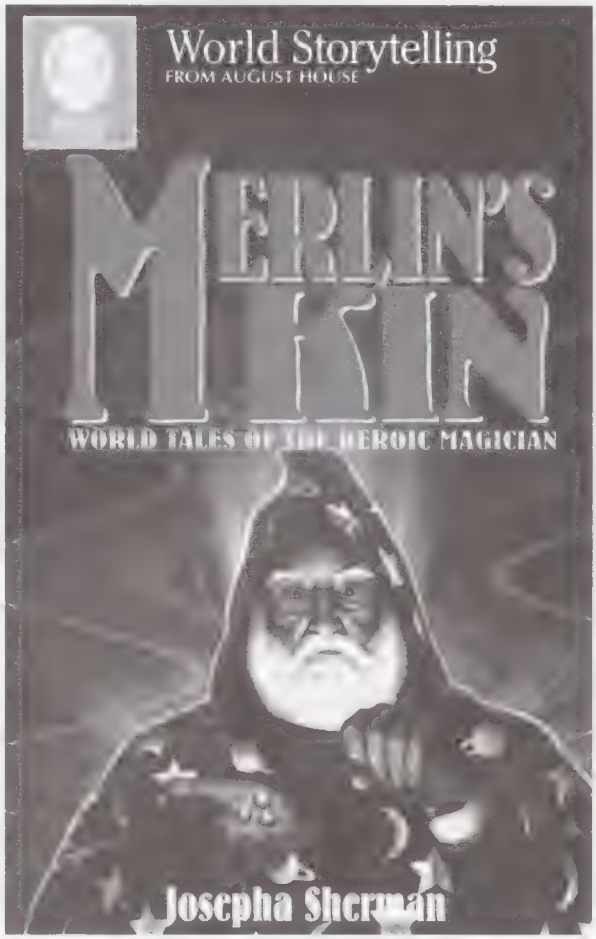
GREASY, GRIMY GOPHER GUTS: THE SUBVERSIVE FOLKLORE OF CHILDREN, a book that was banned by a bookstore in Utah. When it went into its second printing, the first printer they tried said he wouldn't print it, because it had things in it, dirty things against religion.

Now you can exploit this in your publicity. CONTROVERSIAL! A BANNED BOOK! Banned in Utah doesn't have the same ring as Banned in Boston, but it might work. Being banned can be a wonderful sales edge.

That's right. Some of the rhymes we won't mention. They have asterisks in them. These are all rhymes from certified, 100% guaranteed children. There is going to be a reprint.

Let's get back to your fiction. How do you write a novel?

An idea comes to you from Poughkeepsie, Schenectady, or wherever you believe the ideas come from. In the case of **KING'S SON, MAGIC'S SON**, I had an image suddenly of a dark-haired young man plucking an herb that I knew was a magic herb and looking up and smiling at somebody. I don't know where the image came from. It stayed with me and I had to find out what in blazes he was doing. In the case of **THE SHATTERED OATH**, which is historical fantasy set in 8ighth Century Ireland, Bill Fawcett, who's a packager, called me up and said, "I was in Ireland and I came up with this idea. I can't write it. Do you want to write it?" Then we stopped, and we started laughing, because that's the big cliche of the non-writer coming up to you and saying, "I've got this great idea. You write it and we'll split the profits."



But, anyhow, he gave me a good idea. It's about an exiled prince of the Sidhe, the high Fairy Folk, who has been exiled to the most horrible place, the world of humans, 8th century Ireland. I could talk about researching that one.

My initial question about novel writing was intended in terms of methods and the like. Are you an outliner?

I am an outliner. I like having a complete outline because then I know that there is an ending to the story and I can get to the ending. Not everybody likes to do it that way. For novels, I find it easier. Also, once you have a track record, it is easier to sell a novel that way, with a novel and some sample chapters. Sometimes without even the sample chapters. If you are a first-time novelist, you must have a finished novel before you can do anything. No publisher nowadays will buy a first novel if it isn't complete, because they don't know if you can finish the story.

That's always been true, even in considerably more flush times. Sometimes you even get professionals who can't finish it.

There was one woman who wrote the first two books of a trilogy and then went back to the family business. She finally did write the third book, but by then the other two were out of print.

*Sometimes very famous writers get stuck. Philip K. Dick got stuck on **DEUS IRAE** and Roger Zelazny had to finish it for him.*

There was one bestselling writer whose book was on a tight deadline. This is supposedly true. His publisher locked him in his hotel room with his laptop and told him he wasn't coming out until he was finished.

You could do a wonderful book about the folklore of publishing. The following story, if investigated, would probably prove to have been told about several people. I've heard it about Arthur J. Burks, a pulp hack of considerable versatility and output. The story goes that he was in a hotel room and bet someone he could write and sell a story about any two items in the room. So someone pointed to the lampshade and the keyhole. A little while later, Burks was typing. He produced a story about Oriental assassins shooting keyhole-shaped bullets through lampshades ... and sold it. But if this is true, I want someone to find that story.

I'll give you one that may be apocryphal. It may be true. I've heard it attached to Ursula LeGuin. It may not have been. It may have been an editor. It may never have happened. But this particular person, let's say it was Ursula, had finished telling people about not trying to push manuscripts on authors or editors at conventions. She was being harassed by this woman. She escaped into the Room Where No Man Has Gone Before, and as she was sitting there occupied, a hand reached under the door with the manuscript ....That is where the story usually ends. I know how I would have ended it. We won't go into this.

I've heard about writers being chased like that by crazed autograph hounds.

Chelsea Quinn Yarbro was confronted at a convention by a person in a vampire costume who said to her, "I love your stories. They're so true." And he followed her for the whole convention. Stephen King, when he wrote **MISERY**, was writing from the heart.

Going back to folklore a bit, have you ever had the experience of looking into a story you believed to be true and it wriggles away from you?

Yes, of course. [The discussion turns to a widespread rumor involving this or that celebrity ...] There hasn't been a single documented case. But someone said, "Yes, I know one. I know who it happened to." I said, "Well, were you

there?" "No, but I'm friends with the nurse." "Well, did she see it?" "Well, no, but she worked at the hospital ..."

Classic folklore.

Like the story of the Hook. Do you know how old that is? It's the one about the boy and the girl who are parked in the moonlit night and they hear over the radio that there's a madman with a bloody hook who is killing people. She insists that they drive off, and as they drive off there's a thunk! against the car door, and they find, caught in the handle, a bloody hook.

Well, I found a story. A man is riding home, even though he's been warned there is a madman with a bloody axe killing people. And, being as stupid as the characters are in these stories, he stops in the middle of the forest in the middle of the night. But his horse is smarter than he is and the horse takes off at a gallop. He feels a thunk! in the saddle. He reaches his castle door and, you've got it, there's a bloody axe stuck in the saddle. That one dates from the 13th century, from England. That's probably not the original either.

You can probably find one from 700 B.C. somewhere.

You've just given me a chance to plug another book, a folklore collection called **TRICKSTER TALES**, including a story that was first written down in 720 B.C. in Babylon, about a littLeGuy who gets the better of the corrupt mayor. Of course that could never happen in modern times ....That's also from August House, she said shamelessly. You will all want this book too.

Thanks, Josepha. ❄

Results of the Cauldron

Stories:

- 1st Place: **"The Seeds of Memory" by Barbara Davies**
- 2nd Place: **"The Highwayman" by Renee Bennett, and "The Gingerbread House" by Chuck Rothman**
- 3rd Place: **"Pocket Full of Wool" by M. Ruth O'Neill**

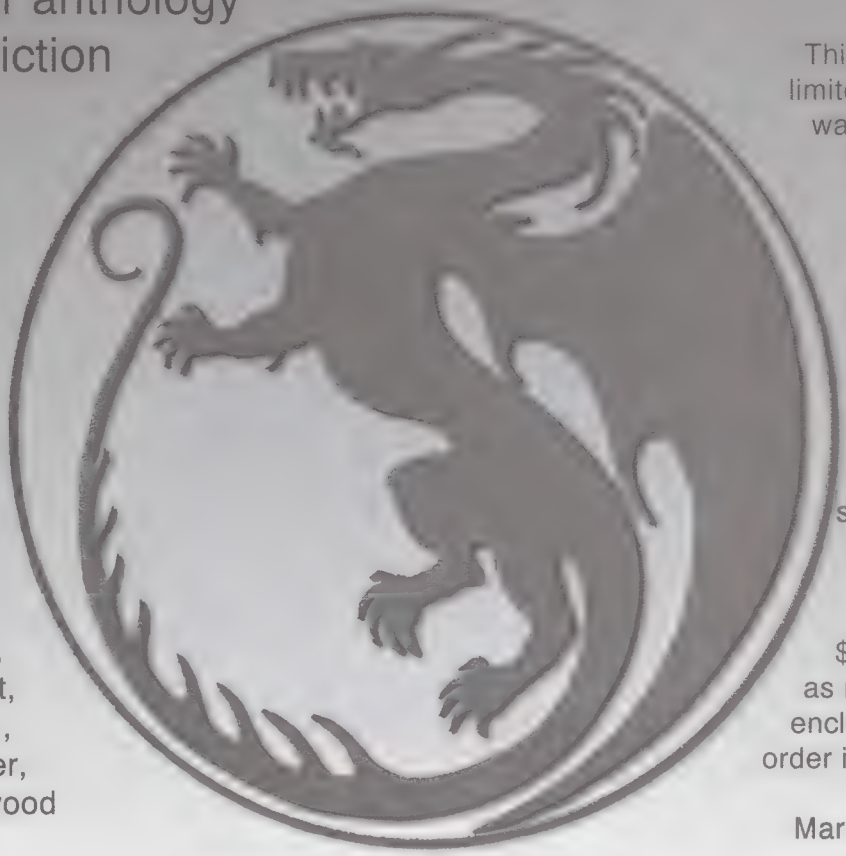
Artwork:

- 1st Place: **Victoria and Julius Lisi for the cover artwork**
- 2nd Place: **Omar Rayyan for "The Seeds of Memory"**
- 3rd Place: **Lori Deitrick for "The Gingerbread House"**

The Cauldron ballot is on page 64 - vote for your favorites. (A photocopy is okay if you don't want to cut up your copy of the magazine; please, only one ballot per reader.)

Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY WORLDS

a hardcover anthology of fantasy fiction



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Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY Magazine
BACK ISSUE DESCRIPTIONS

___#3 **(Winter 1989)** *The Adinkra Cloth* (a Nebula finalist!) - Mary C. Aldridge. *A Glassmaker's Courage* - M. C. Easton and Phyllis Ann Karr. Cover art by Kelly and Laura Freas. Guest editorial by Julian May.

___#14 **(Fall 1991)** *Black Ribbon* - Dawn Albright. *The Tengu's Scroll* - Dana Kramer-Rolls. *Stand By Me* - Glen and Connie Ten-Eyck. Cover art by Gail Butler. Interview with Teresa Edgerton.

___#16 **(Spring-Summer 1992)** *Never Look at a Gift Sword in the Horse's Mouth* - Jennifer Roberson. *The Death of Ranat's Pass* - Katherine Blake. Cover by Alan Gutierrez. Interview with Lois McMaster Bujold.

___#18 **(Winter 1992)** *Arakney's Web* - Jo Clayton. *The Black Tower* - Laura J. Underwood. *Queeneyes* - eluki bes shahar. Cover byNick Jainschigg.

___#20 **(Summer 1993)** *Cannibal Sorcerer* - Evangeline Walton & Bruce D. Arthurs. *Maiden, Are You Warm?* - Isabel Cole. Cover art by Ron Walotsky.

___#22 **(Winter 1993)** *Mad Evren's Dreams* - Phyllis Ann Karr. *Ladyslipper* - Lawrence Schimel. *The Demon's Lamentation* - Laura J. Underwood. Cover by Alicia Austin. Interview with Elizabeth Moon.

___#23 **(Spring 1994)** *Killer Byte* by Mercedes Lackey. *To Kill the Undead* - Marion Zimmer Bradley. *Never Doubt a Sorcerer* - John Buentello. Cover art by Vincent Di Fate. Peter Beagle interview.

___#24 **(Summer 1994)** *Ice Princess* - Elisabeth Waters. *The First Maxim* - Steven Piziks. *The Kestrel's Tears* - Kimberly Egan. *The Gargoyle's Burden* - L.S. Silverthorne. Cover by David Cherry. Katherine Kurtz interview.

___#25 **(Fall 1994)** *The Masterpainter* - Diana L. Paxson. *On the Holy Mountain* - Darrell Schweitzer. *The Beginning of Tears* - Steven Piziks. *Firecrackers* - Tim Miller. Cover by Jill Bauman. Interview with Ray Nelson.

___#26 **(Winter 1994)** – *Dinner Music* - Jo Clayton. *Fool's Fire* - Marion Zimmer Bradley. *The Mage Who Dreamed of Gryphons* - Cynthia McQuillin. Cover by Nick Jainschigg. Interview with Jennifer Roberson.

___#27 **(Spring 1995)***Pot of Dreams* - C.J. Cherryh & Jane S. Fancher. *A Little Night Music* - Dorothy J. Heydt. Cover by David A. Cherry. Interview with Gahan Wilson.

___#28 **(Summer 1995)** *The Harder They Fall* - Tanya Huff. *The Long Divorce of Steel* - eluki bes shahar. *Get With Child a Mandrake Root* - K. Prosser and L. Swope. Cover by Bob Eggleton. Interview with Diana Paxson and Adrienne Martine-Barnes.

___#29 **(Fall 1995)** *Bloodsong* - Jo Clayton. *Humphrey's Dilemma* - Cynthia McQuillin. *Caitlin's Magic* - Jackie Shank. *The Cats of Time* - William A. Sell. Cover by Nicholas Jainschigg. Interview with Tanya Huff.

___#30 **(Winter 1996)** *A Prince Among Frogs* - Elisabeth Waters. *The Counterfeit Maiden* - Richard Purtill. *Fatherhood* - Steven Piziks. *La Donna Triste* - Patricia Russo. Cover by Jonathan Hunt. Interview with Lisa Goldstein.

___#31 **(Spring 1996)** *The Weeping Loon* - RobinWayne Bailey. *Dragon-in-Law* - Connie Hirsch. *Neko's Dance* - Carol Leever. Cover by James Balkovek. Interview with Poul Anderson.

___#32 **(Summer 1996)** *Fox Maid's Travail* - Jo Clayton. *The Little Pink Worm* - Dorothy Heydt. *Eighty Shen* - Carrie Martin. Cover by Nicholas Jainschigg. Interview with Charles de Lint.

___#33 **(Fall 1996)** *A Sphinx in the Mind* - Karen Anderson. *United Powers* - Kathleen Massie-Ferch. *A Painterly Effect* - Ardath Mayhar. Cover by Margaret Organ-Kean. Interview - Esther Friesner.

___#34 **(Winter 1997)***Thin Man* - Steven Piziks. *The Bone's Captive Bride* - Jo Clayton. *The Test* - Max Wright.*Thimbleful of Magic* - Carrie Martin. Cover by George Barr. Interview - Ellen Kushner.

___#35 **(Spring 1997)** *Maiden Phoenix* - India Edghill. *The Rose, the RichMan, and Mother Berchte* - Steven Piziks. Cover Vincent Di Fate. Interview with Susan Shwartz.

___#36 **(Summer 1997**) *The Knife that Makes Men* - Mary Aldridge. *Kvetchula* - Darrell Schweitzer. Cover by Alicia Austin and George Barr. Interview with Vincent Di Fate.

___#37 **(Fall 1997)***Grey* - Mercedes Lackey. *Winterkill* - Colin Dunn. *Exterminator* - Cynthia Mcquillin. Cover by Nicholas Jainschigg. Interview with Octavia E. Butler.

___#38 **(Winter 1998)** *Bisclavret* - India Edghill. *A Voice in the Night* - Katherine Blake. *Whistle the Wind* - Cynthia McQuillin. Cover by Margaret Davis. Interview with Lawrence Watt-Evans.

___#39 **(Spring 1998)** *Escape Artists* - Susan Shwartz. *The Valley of Stones* - Patricia Duffy Novak. *The House in the Hollow* - Helen Kenyon. Cover by David Cherry. Interview with Connie Willis.

___#40 **(Summer 1998)** *Ivy* - Esther Friesner. *Running to Camelot* - Darrell Schweitzer. *The Piper's Tale* - Laura Underwood. Cover by Mark Harrison.Interview with Robert Holdstock.

___#41 **(Fall 1998)** *Tiger, Tiger* - Carol Leever. *Gryphon Rider* - Cherith Baldry. *Three Nights Penance 'til Lakkas Day* - Janna Silverstein. Cover by Carl Lundgren. Interview with Nancy Springer.

___#42 **(Winter 1999)** *Hellhound* - Deborah Wheeler. *A Winter's Tale* -Laura Underwood. *Absinthe Eyes* - Charlene Brusso. Cover by Margaret Organ-Kean. Interview with eluki bes shahar.

___#43 **(Spring 1999)** *Tasks* - Susan Dexter. *The Seeds of Memory* - Barbara Davies. *It's Not the Pig* - Theresa Feehan. Cover by Victoria & Julius Lisi. Interview with Terry Bisson.

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Fantasy Magazine TALKS TO WRITERS:

Historical Fiction

by Ann Sharp

What do the historical novel and the science fiction novel have in common, grandmama?

What distinguishes those genres is the setting, my dear.

What, then, do the mystery and the romance and the adventure have in common?

They are distinguished by the plotformula, my dear.

What do juveniles and doctor/nurse books have in common?

In those cases it is the characters, my child.

What is a "cross-genre," grandmama?

A cross-genre is a story using elements from more than one genre.

Why write one, grandmama?

In the hopes that bookstores will display it in both sections, and readers of each genre will buy it, my child, thus doubling the sales.

Does that really happen, grandmama, or do the readers who prefer one of the genres decide that the cross-genre book belongs to the other one?

That depends partly on how well written it is, my dear.

How does one write a cross-genre story well, grandmama?

One carefully chooses the right combination for the particular story one is telling, my child.

What are the pitfalls, grandmama?

The pitfalls, my dear, begin if the author is not well versed in more than one genre, which is why your mama wishes you to apply yourself to your studies. One must also be aware of the different expectations of both audiences who might read a cross-genre story. If one attempts to write a historical mystery, the mystery fans will expect a gripping plot, and the history fans will expect correct facts. Thus it is straightforward enough to write a historical juvenile, for children are much the same throughout the ages; why, your grandmama was one herself during a most interesting historical period. It is particularly difficult to write an excellent steamy historical romance; by the time the heroine is steamy enough, the historical facts have usually become soggy and disintegrated.

First, my child, your plot should not be historically impossible, even if it is set in the future, so do your research: An otherwise likable Regency was spoiled for me because the plot dealt with a widowed heroine who was living—in the politest sense—with her brother-in-law, the Earl. After a series of adventures, she and her brother-in-law fall in love and marry each other. Unfortunately, the entire story was based on an false premise: It was legally impossible to marry a dead spouse's sibling—husband's brother or wife's sister—until after World War I. When you married, you contracted an ecclesiastical "affinity" with your spouse's family. Marrying one's "dead wife's sister" was a public question in Victorian times in the same way that "should we abolish capital punishment" is in this century. If anyone in the publisher's office had caught this, the late husband could have been the Earl's cousin, instead of his brother, and the book would have been historically palatable.

Next, do not let your plot lead you into altering known historical facts: George Washington's whereabouts have been well documented; please don't have him working on a suntan in South Carolina when he is known to have been at Valley Forge. The D.A.R. will hex you.

More subtly, beware of altering historical attitudes to suit late-twentieth-century liberal views—find out what the real attitudes of the historical period were, or consider very carefully what the attitudes of individuals in a future time would be, and work around them. I can assure you that my grandmama's views were very different from your mother's on a great many topics. It will certainly improve the authenticity of your background and very likely improve your plot. A recent flaming romance with yet another feisty heroine involved her going on the Third Crusade, disguised as a boy, where Richard the Lion-Heart managed to penetrate her disguise. Naturally, romances being what they are, she and Richard had a son. The dramatic ending is that Richard died after making a nuncupative will (a verbal will made on one's deathbed to witnesses, who swear to its provisions in probate court) leaving his kingdom to this illegitimate infant—completely ignoring his next brother's legitimate, half-grown son and his own youngest brother. This is not the attitude of a twelfth-century king to marriage or inheritance orbastardy or minority rule—no responsible government official of the time would have taken it seriously, though you needn't tell your mama I said so. She greatly admires the late King Richard.

Grandmama, may I write a cross-genre story?

After you've changed from your good pinafore and prunella slippers to your "Writers Do it By the Book" tee-shirt. What shall you call it, dear?

❄

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edited by

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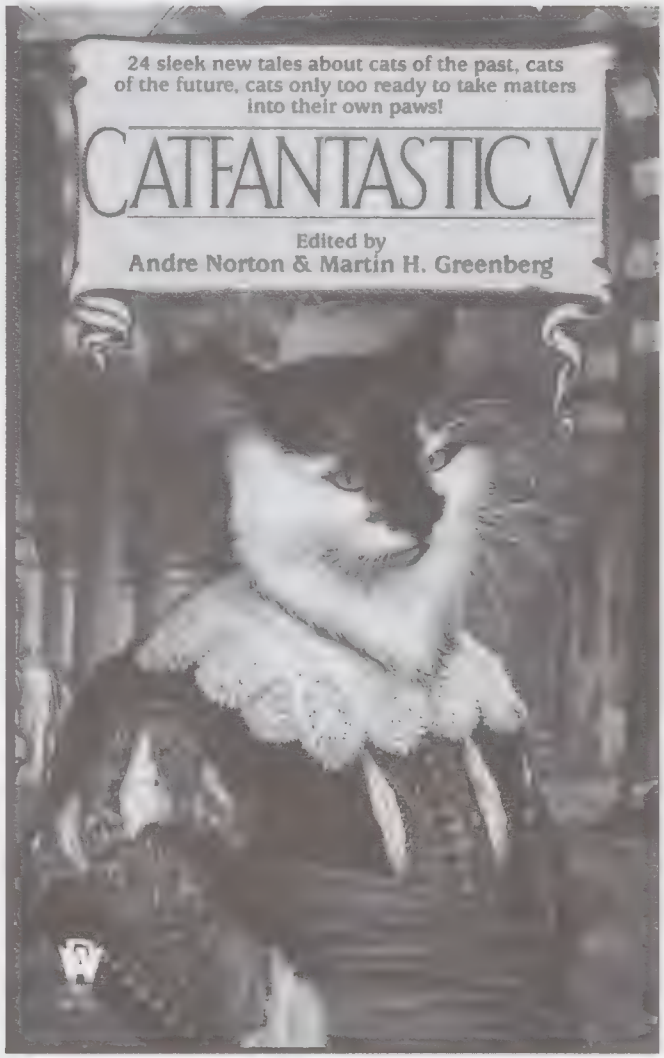
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The Magic of the Lost God

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by Mary Catelli

The campfire glowed in the entrance of the cave where they camped. Alice Ladybird looked uneasily at the walls of the Egyptian tomb. The light flickered over the hieroglyphics and the painting of workers reaping the harvest. Her stepsister might grub through sand to find bits of mummy without a twinge, and talk of how the natives wanted nothing so much as a rich tomb to plunder, but Alice still felt uneasy.

Alice looked back to the fire where her mother and stepfather sat. She decided, abruptly, that Veronica had a good idea in taking a moonlight walk. She walked to the entrance and looked out at the silvered sand. The moon's flat white light spread out without a cloud to dim it. Her hand rested on the entrance for a second. She had not dreamed what it would mean, when her mother declared she was marrying a widower with a daughter. The then Cordelia Ladybird had not even mentioned that Edward Black was an Egyptologist — though that had affected Alice more than anything else. She started to walk.

A sound broke into her thoughts. A low voice came over the dunes, intoning something over and over. Alice frowned; she recognized Veronica's voice, but not what she said; Veronica was reciting, "Abdom. Abdom. Abdom."

Alice slowly walked around the dune, ready to freeze at any second, and saw Veronica, sitting cross-legged and looking at papers in front of her — fortunately with her back to her stepsister.

Veronica stopped and looked up, looking sternly on the air a yard ahead of her. "I have given you your name," she said, fiercely. "I have given you the power you have not had in three millennia. Give me the love of Captain James Miller."

Alice blinked. They had met Captain Miller at his regiment earlier in the month. She gave her stepsister a sidelong glance. Captain Miller was a handsome man, about thirty-five, of independent means. She licked her lips; the captain was also already engaged to be married.

The air in front of Veronica shimmered in the moonlight. Alice's breath caught. A voice as dry as sand came out of the air. "He is faithful to his love."

A cold smile twitched Veronica's lips. "Would I want the love of one who would be unfaithful?"

"It will not be easy," the voice said. "Much power is needed to win faithful love." Silence reigned for a second. Veronica looked at the haze with cold eyes. The voice added, "I will need my name. Many times."

Alice, scarcely breathing, began to carefully work her way back to the camp. Veronica seemed bent on her bargaining, but Alice did not want to attract her attention.

The evening's cool damp air came in off the Nile and slipped through the windows into the ballroom. Alice stood against the wall, watching the waltz. Other dancers swirled through her vision, but she watched one handsome pair, a woman in elegant pale green gown, and a officer in his regimentals, the light shining on her red hair and his chestnut brown. A smug smile hovered on Veronica's face; Captain Miller looked down at her with an adoring but puzzled expression.

Alice's eyes drifted across the ballroom to where Isabelle Higgins stood among the captain's messmates, trying to flirt. Miss Higgins wore a blue gown, the finest in the room, and her blond hair was arranged to perfection, but her blue eyes, with plaintive shadows, kept drifting back across the ballroom to her fiance. Alice's mouth tightened. Captain Miller had not even asked Miss Higgins for a dance, or noticed her flirting.

Alice's eyes fell. Only minutes after she had returned to camp, Veronica had followed her. Apparently, her stepsister had brought her haggling quickly to a close.

"May I have this dance, Miss Ladybird?"

Alice turned quickly, surprised by the apparition of one of the captains at her shoulder. "Oh, no, thank you, but I'm just too tired now," she said. The captain looked disappointed, but with thoughts of Veronica flooding her mind, Alice did not trust herself not to step all over her partner's feet.

"Perhaps some punch to refresh you," said Captain — Arthbut, Alice remembered.

Alice made herself smile. "Why, that would be delightful," she declared. She accepted Arthbut's arm. Perhaps it would distract her from Veronica, since she could do nothing about her stepsister anyway.

Veronica's laugh rang across the ballroom. Alice wondered, with a touch of malice that surprised her, if her stepsister had thought of breach-of-promise suits. Miss Higgins, if rumor told the truth, had enough spirit to fight once the shock wore off.

Alice drowsed in bed a little, wondering why the sun had to get up so early in the morning. She yawned and almost resolved to return to sleep.

She heard Veronica move in the bedroom next to her, and then her stepsister's shuffling papers. Alice woke completely, and licked her lips. She got slowly out of bed and crept closer to the wall, laying her ear against it.

The walls muffled the words, but Alice could make them out. "Abdom," said her stepsister, "I require more. You shall have your name if you fulfill it."

The dry voice barely reached the wall. "You promised my name for the love of Captain Miller."

Alice could almost see Veronica's dismissing gesture. "I need more. Turn the love of Isabelle Higgins away from him."

After a second, the voice, still dry but almost petulant, said, "You bargained for the heart of Captain Miller."

Her tone mocking, Veronica said, "What, can you not?"

The voice grew dry again. "I have changed the heart of many a man and woman now dust. I have let no scruple bind me. I have kept my bargains, and I have kept this one."

The papers rustled as if Veronica lifted something from them. "I have the last inscription of your name," Veronica said, her voice low and threatening.

The noon sunlight dazzled outside the house. Alice sat on the porch, leaning back in the wicker chair. One of Edward Black's books on Egypt sat in her lap, and in spite of the heat, she read intently about the parchments. The book had one or two comments about magical intent, but no detail. Her fingers tightened on the page in frustration, crinkling it. As if a book would easily lay out for her all she needed to defeat Veronica's plans! Alice bit her lip. Rumor said that Miss Higgins had broken her engagement and seemed not to care, and Veronica herself had talked of Captain Miller and, with more pleasure, of his rich father.

Mr. Black's jovial voice rang out over

the porch. "Why, Alice, are you finding the study of Egypt interesting?" He came up beside her chair. "I know you did not, at first."

Alice turned her eyes demurely down to the book. "It grows more — intriguing," she said. She looked up. "It talks about magical writings; how did the Egyptians use them?"

Mr. Black sat in the nearest chair and leaned back. "Why, they held that words have power, especially names. By repeating someone's name, whether aloud or in writing, you gave him power. By eradicating a name ..." His hand closed on air. "You eradicated him." Silence reigned for a second. "Pharaohs were known to try to strike their enemies' names from every inscription where they occurred, for that very reason."

Alice frowned, her forehead creasing. "If, on the other hand, you wanted magical power," she thought aloud, "you would have someone repeat your name."

The man smiled. "No, you would repeat a god's name, and have him work magic on your behalf because of the power you gave him." His tone grew more ponderous, like a university lecture. "The magicians favored more obscure gods, who were more grateful for such power."

Alice licked her lips. "How could any being who could use a man's help do more than what the man himself could do?" she asked, tentatively.

His smile deepened. "There," he declared, "you have hit on the essential absurdity of the whole system." He leaned back. "Not that it matters to us; the gods of ancient Egypt could hardly speak English."

Alice said nothing. Much though he loved her mother, it would not trouble Edward Black much to lock up his stepdaughter as a lunatic.

Alice let her hand rest against the porch wall. "I really think that the dazzle would make my headache worse," she said. She glanced sidelong through her eyelashes at her mother.

Cordelia Black shrugged as she pulled on her gloves. "You should have been more careful about wearing a hat," she said, faintly rebuking. She left for the carriage, where Veronica already waited. Alice, her eyes grave, watched the carriage leave and turned back inside.

In the kitchen the cook said something, the noise if not the meaning reaching through the wall, and the maid laughed. Alice started up the stairs, glancing at the kitchen door now and then until she reached the landing. The servants seemed bent on their chatter. Alice drew a deep breath and hurried down the hall. She pulled open the door to Veronica's room and stepped within.

One of Veronica's dress sprawled over the chair. A half-open drawer revealed her parchments, with a hieroglyphic-covered piece of pottery sitting on it. Alice, feeling a little chilly, looked at the amulet without touching it and translated the forms into their sounds. She spelled out "Abdom" and felt even colder: now she had no excuse. Carefully, she pulled the drawer open and took out the amulet. The pottery shard seemed as bland as any piece she had ever seen. Her hand tightened about it as she remembered that Veronica had wrought no magic to speak with the god again.

"Abdom," Alice said.

The air shimmered like a mirage. "You are not she," said the god, his voice as dry as a desert wind.

Alice gulped, wondering what the god could do with her name. Do not tell him it, she decided. She gave the haze another look and resolved not to give it her stepsister's, either. "I am not. I bargain for myself." The hieroglyphics pressed into her hand as her grip tightened.

After a second of silence, the god said, "What do you bargain for?"

Alice answered promptly: "That you break the spells you cast on Captain Miller and Miss Higgins. That you take the knowledge from — her mind, who bargained for you for the spells on Captain Miller and Miss Higgins — that you take from her the knowledge of how to cast such spells."

Silence reigned for a long minute. The god's voice grew menacing when he spoke again: "What will you give for this?"

Alice lifted her hand. "I have the last inscription of your name," she said.

A breeze swirled the curtains. Alice did not, quite, think that the god had caused it, but she glanced uneasily at it.

The god's voice was flat. "She gave me my name."

"No one will give you your name again if I destroy this," Alice said, harshly. She remembered its brag of changing hearts and wondered if she could leave such a plague to the future, but she had no other way to free the captain and Miss Higgins.

After a minute, the god spoke. "I will do it."

Alice lifted her head. "When?"

The shimmer rippled. "I have done it."

Alice nodded, once. She laid the amulet back down on the chest and looked at the parchments. "I ought to destroy these," she said, thinking aloud.

"Oh, do not." The voice grew as coaxing as its dryness would permit. "Only those spells will let you summon me up, and I can give you great power."

Alice's mouth tightened. She had not promised to spare the parchments. She started to pick up the parchments.

"Do not," the god said, fiercely, and Alice felt heat strike her like a blow. She gave the shimmer a baneful glance, and the god's voice deepened. "Do not!" She dragged in a deep breath, and the air seared her lungs.

Alice grabbed the handiest thing and hurled it blindly at the voice. She heard a faint sound of breaking pottery and stood in a suddenly empty room. She staggered back, catching herself on the bureau; the parchments crackled in her hand against the wood. The cracked clay lay opposite, against the wall. Alice's mouth twisted. She remembered that the god had only taken her stepsister's knowledge of how to work the magic, not her will. Alice walked across the room to grind the amulet under her heel before she burned the parchments.

Veronica sat in the corner of the ballroom and sulked. Alice ignored her. Veronica had worried Edward and Cordelia ever since that afternoon, when Veronica had returned from the call with a look of settled fury on her face.

Alice had other worries. Her eyes went to the man in the opposite corner of the ballroom, watching Isabelle Higgins dance with Captain Arthbut. Miss Higgins laughed merrily. Alice looked away; Miss Higgins had not cast a single glance at Captain Miller all evening. The god might have freed her heart, but he had not cured her wounded vanity.

Alice's eyes half closed, her eyelashes veiling them. Not, she conceded judiciously, that Miss Higgins ought to put up with that kind of treatment; even if

the captain had known the truth, Miss Higgins would laugh in his face at such an outlandish excuse. Alice's eyes returned to Captain Miller.

Marrying Veronica would have made him more miserable, Alice reminded herself, and not long ago she thought that she could have done nothing at all. Suddenly, the ballroom felt very close. Alice gathered her skirts and hurried outside, murmuring brief excuses to her acquaintances. One matron took her sleeve. "You look very pale, Miss Ladybird," Mrs. Carstairs said.

Alice nodded. "I thought the night air." She glanced at the veranda's door, and the matron nodded and let her go. She started to talk with her companions again: "Really, Captain Miller acted so very badly toward her, I wouldn't ..."

Alice hurried out into the cooler air that smelled of the Nile. She drew in a deep breath and looked out into the darkness. The ballroom cast squares of light on the veranda, but beyond that only the half moon and the stars shone. The Nile's ripples now and then appeared, carrying a silver reflection. Alice sighed, watching them.

The door opened again, and a man stood shadowed against it. Alice glanced over while he was still outlined against the lights, and recognized Captain Miller. She drew back. The man would hardly want to see her.

His head jerked around at the movement. "Excuse me, madam."

"There's plenty of room for two, if you want a breath of fresh air," Alice said. He frowned a little, as if he recognized her voice, and leaned on the railing to stare out at the dark waters. After a minute, she said, "It's certainly very close in the ballroom."

Captain Miller grunted his agreement. He pushed off the railing and said, "And, of course, there's all the gossiping matrons." His mouth set. Alice tilted her head to one side. "Do not look so inquiring, Miss Ladybird; I can not tell you how I lost my head over your sister."

Alice shrugged. "She can have that effect." She looked at Captain Miller and was glad that Veronica started to sulk once her spell broke; if her stepsister had continued to pursue him, Captain Miller might have felt that he was honor-bound to her.

Captain Miller looked at her strangely. Alice lifted her head, realizing that the captain probably thought

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she had seen more of these affairs; she said, coolly, "It is probably best to put the whole affair aside."

Captain Miller flinched. "Miss Higgins," he said, "has already put the whole affair aside."

Alice spread her hands. "There are other ladies at the ball," she said, dryly. "You need not pledge your heart, but you ought not to mope in the corner. Activity is the best cure for a broken heart."

Captain Miller gave her a strange look. "May I have the next dance?"

Alice stood with her mouth open for a second. "Yes, certainly," she said, wondering if the captain thought she had been angling for the dance.

Mrs. Carstairs drew Alice aside by the punch bowl, casting a wary glance at Captain Miller. "I must warn you," she said, her voice low. "You saw how he cast your sister aside, but perhaps you did not know that he was engaged to Miss Higgins before your family arrived."

Alice cast her eyes down, not quite willing to tell Mrs. Carstairs that she had promised Captain Miller two more dances. One had been quite enough to confirm Veronica's excellent taste.

"Oh, you girls! You would ruin your life without a second thought!" Mrs. Carstairs's excellent advice poured out as Alice sipped her punch and looked across the room. Her eyebrows went up. Her stepsister, her cheeks flushed, glared at Alice with a fury greater than the afternoon when she lost her magic.

Alice turned away. A minute later, she heard Veronica at her shoulder. "You little sneak, do you think you will be able to catch him?" Alice looked over her shoulder at her stepsister. Veronica spat, "You haven't a twopence to your name."

Alice shrugged again. "You have not seemed much interested in him for the last week," she said, lazily. She smiled a little. This part of foiling Veronica was much more pleasant than the first, she thought.

❄

Mary Catelli lives in Connecticut, where she programs computers for a living and reads, writes and collects rejections slips for fun. Her work has appeared in *Cricket*, various **SWORD AND SORCERESS** anthologies, *Tomorrow*, and *Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY Magazine*. She is currently working on short stories and a novel.

She writes: "Many years ago, I read the bit of lore about ancient Egyptian gods and the practice of magic upon which I based 'Magic of the Lost God'. I kept on thinking every now and then that such a magician would make an interesting story, placed in some ancient land, but I could not get it to work. Then, I read a book about women travellers in the Victorian Age, and it mentioned tourists hunting for artifacts. Once the two ideas clicked together, the whole thing worked."

George Barr has been a professional artist since 1960. He has produced dozens of science fiction illustrations over the years, including many for us, starting with the cover of issue #1! He has received a Hugo as Best Fan Artist and has been Artist Guest of Honor at Worldcon.

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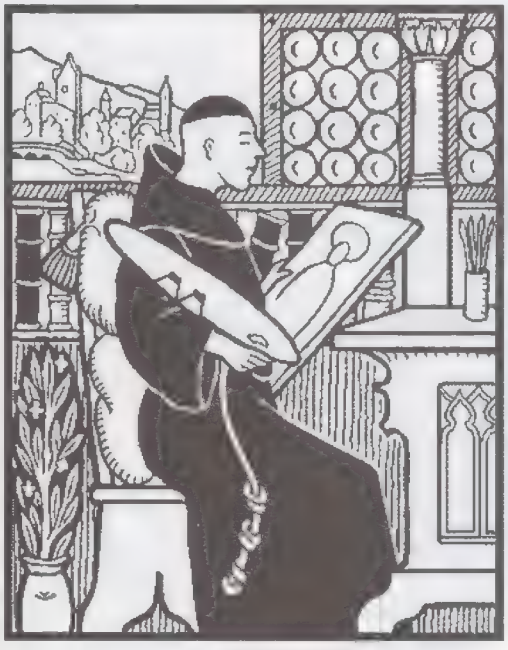

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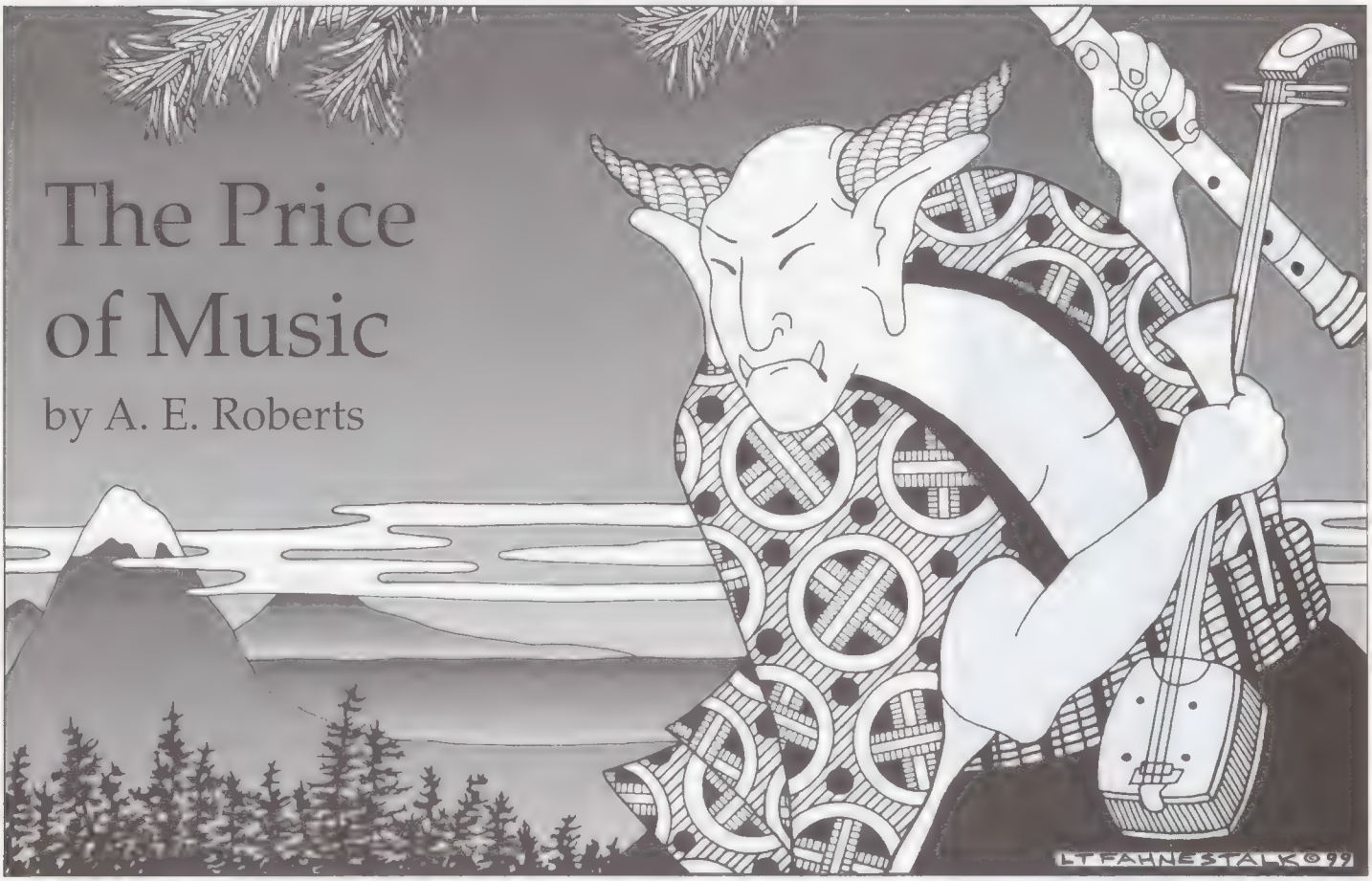

The Price of Music

by A. E. Roberts

In the mountains above Kyoto lived an *oni*. This red ogre was blessed and cursed: no creature had as keen hearing as he. What he enjoyed listening to the most was music, but he had no more talent than a crow. Among his treasures was a three-stringed *samisen* and a *shakuhachi* flute. But each time he tried to play them, the noise was so horrible that his large, sensitive ears would fold up like a paper fan.

He could hear the music from the human village from his porch. But then, hearing the ocean's roar from a distant hill was not the same as standing on the beach and listening to the waves crash around you, and feeling the thunder in your bones. He hid himself in the pine forest behind the village and the town musicians played so close that Kenyuki could almost touch them. "Arrrh, arrrh, arrrh," he purred as he listened. The villagers, hearing him, fled into the fields. Standing twice as tall as a man, he could have kidnapped a musician, but he didn't think that they would be willing to play if frightened. If I want to hear music this close, he thought, I will have to make friends with them.

He sat on his porch in the shade of the thatched roof. He spread his huge ears out, so that they stretched from his shoulders to his curving horns. He cupped his hands behind his ears, closed his eyes and concentrated.

"The rains are late this year," the village headman observed. "Kenyuki must be persecuting us."

"If the rains don't come soon," a farmer said, "we won't be able to plant on time. Won't that oni leave us in peace?"

Kenyuki stood up and let his ears droop. If I can bring them some rain, he thought, I can win their friendship. So he climbed the tallest tree on the mountain, and jumped on the back of a cloud. Riding it like a chariot, he herded more and more clouds to his mountain until he could hear Raiden, the God of Thunder, begin to grumble.

And then the rains came.

The people in the village had often heard of tsunami, the great waves, coming from the ocean. This was the first time they had seen one coming from the mountains. After the flood washed out the irrigation ditches above the town, Kenyuki unfolded his ears and listened in to what the villagers were saying.

"Ah, the calamity!" the headman said. "Kenyuki was behind this, no doubt!"

Kenyuki crept down that night, and half buried a box of gold *koban* coins in the debris.

A young boy, poking about in the wreckage, uncovered the wooden box and brought it to the headman. "Ah, the luck! Kenyuki must be off elsewhere, no doubt!"

The villagers argued about whether the coins should be used to repair the storm damage, or to hire samurai to drive off the oni. After each farmer had his say, the headman said, "Floods being more common than oni, it would be prudent to rebuild the irrigation ditches. Besides, without being able to control the water in our fields, we will be unable to grow our rice crops."

Fate plays havoc with my plans, Kenyuki thought. He sat on his front porch and scratched his horns, thinking. In the summer heat, he had removed most of the rice paper walls, letting a pine-scented breeze blow through the house.

O-Yari, the blue oni from the next mountain over, stopped by for a visit. Unlike Kenyuki, O-Yari had only one curving horn, this located on the top of

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his head. The tusks growing out of O-Yari's lower jaw were even larger than Kenyuki's.

Kenyuki was surprised to see his friend; it was O-Yari's gift to be able to move as quietly as a cloud's shadow. "Good morning, old friend," O-Yari said as he put down his huge spear and a sack, "you look unhappy today."

"*Ohio gozai masu*," Kenyuki returned the greeting. "I just was wishing I could be friends with the humans down in the village."

"What a foolish idea! Humans! Why do you need humans for friends when you have me?"

"It is said, 'A near neighbor is a better friend than a distant cousin.'"

"Well," said O-Yari, "they also say 'Old friends are better than new, and new clothes are better than old.'"

"True. But humans can make sweeter music than bird song, brighter songs than the rushing brook."

"Music. Bah!"

"Besides," Kenyuki said, "they have the most enlightening conversations. The other day, I heard a farmer ask a priest if a Buddhist dog has a soul. Do you know what the priest answered?"

O-Yari opened his mouth, filled with sharp teeth, to answer.

But Kenyuki said, "No, sit like this and think about it." Kenyuki rested his knees on the ground and sat back on his heals, in *zazen* position.

O-Yari pulled up the legs of his tiger-skin trousers a bit and knelt. "Like this?" he asked.

"Yes," said Kenyuki. "Now think about the question." They sat for a while. Kenyuki folded his massive hands in his lap and closed his eyes in meditation.

Kenyuki could hear his friend fidgeting.

"I give up," O-Yari said at last, "does a Buddhist dog have a soul?"

"*Mu*!" cried Kenyuki joyfully.

"*Mu*?! What's that supposed to mean? I don't understand."

Kenyuki stood up. "I don't either, but it sounded very profound."

"If repeating profound sayings brings wisdom, you must be wise, Kenyuki." O-Yari stood up and went to retrieve his bag. "What a stupid answer to a stupid question!" he muttered.

"I heard that!"

"Bah. 'Does a Buddhist dog have a soul?' What does it matter, as long as a dog *tastes* like a dog? Which reminds me," O-Yari said as he picked up his sack, "I brought something for us to eat."

Kenyuki shoved the bag away. "I've given up eating red meat, raw or otherwise. I will eat what the villagers eat."

"More for me, then," said O-Yari, sticking his head in the sack and rummaging about.

Kenyuki turned his back and ignored the growls and snarls, and the gnashing sounds of O-Yari as best he could. "Maybe if I invited the people of the village down below to come to my home for a feast."

"Great idea," said O-Yari, wiping his face with the back of his arm. "Then, when they're all here, I'll jump out of the bamboo grove beside your house and grab them!"

"No!" Kenyuki cried and shoved his friend. "You'll do no such thing! I'm trying to make friends with these villagers, not scare them to death!"

"I still like my idea better," grumbled O-Yari.

That night, when all the villagers were asleep, Kenyuki wrote a letter to the farmers and sent O-Yari down the mountain to hang it on the gate to the town. Not even the local dogs heard the silent O-Yari passing through.

Before sunrise, Kenyuki sat on his porch, stretched out his ears, and listened to the farmers arguing about what to do.

"It's clearly a trap," one farmer said. "If we go up there, he'll kill and eat us all. We should ignore his invitation."

The village smith said, "That will insult the oni. He will be enraged and come down here. He'll kill and eat us all."

"Ah, calamity!" the village headman said. "Either way, we will end up in that big belly of his. What can we do? Even if we had the money, we couldn't hire samurai quickly enough; the invitation is for this afternoon."

The oldest man in the village cleared his throat. Kenyuki could hear the old man's knees creaking as this farmer stood up.

"I have lived a long life, and have only a few years remaining. For the sake of my family and my village, I will go to the oni's house."

His old wife spoke up. "I will go with him. What is my life worth without my old man? Life is so full of sorrow, it would be a good thing to offer myself up."

Other old, frail voices joined in. Soon,

Kenyuki could hear the sound of slow footsteps on the path leading up from the village. Kenyuki dashed around his kitchen in a flurry of action. In the center of the kitchen was the *irori*, the fire pit filled with white sand. Kenyuki lowered the chain tied to the rafters above, hung an iron pot and lit a fire beneath it. O-Yari looked on, perplexed.

"The trail is steep and the old people are slow," Kenyuki explained, "so I still have time to get a meal ready." He pounded steamed rice in a mortar with a pestle as large as a tree to make sweet *mochi*. Set a pot over the fire to boil up some *miso* soup. He cooked up some *kimi-dango*, the millet dumplings that his mother used to make. Soon the house was full of smells of ginger and noodles.

"Welcome to my most humble home," Kenyuki called out as the elders arrived. "You are my most honored guests." He set down a tray of green tea and *sake* beside the low table of food. "What would you like to eat?"

"Yarrr!" roared O-Yari, bursting out of the bamboo grove.

The old people fled down the hill, screaming.

"Ha," O-Yari hooted, "I thought you said they were old. I bet it has been years since they ran like that. What fun!" O-Yari rolled on the ground, his laughter booming like a bass *taiko* drum.

Kenyuki was not laughing. His hands were bunched in fists. "I told you not to do that!"

"I didn't," O-Yari said, sitting up. "I didn't grab anyone. Did you see me grab anyone?"

"They've all run off." Kenyuki sat down, and hid his face with his hands.

"Too bad. That means more for the two of us." O-Yari swept all the dumplings into his mouth at once. "Mmmmm. Your mother, the old *yamauba*, was a good cook."

Kenyuki spread his ears and listened. In the village below, the smith was talking to the village headman. "Hear that screaming? The thunder of oni laughter? All of our old people are surely dead."

"This is too much," said the headman. "I will ask each family to give me their most prized possessions, and hire some samurai to kill that monster."

"Ohhh," groaned Kenyuki. "Now I'm in trouble. Think, O-Yari, how am I going to get out of this one?"

The blue oni lifted the heavy iron pot and poured the *miso* soup into his mouth. "Thinking makes my head hurt. I'm much better at eating."

"Arrr, you make me so mad that I could hit you!" Kenyuki thought for a moment. "That's an idea. It might work ...."

"What?"

"Yes," said Kenyuki. "Let's fight. Or at least pretend to. Make a lot of noise and a great to-do. Then I can tell the people in the village that I beat the evil blue oni and drove him off. I'll be a hero!"

"Ah! You are clever!"

O-Yari sprang like a tiger, knocking Kenyuki to the far end of the porch. The two rolled around, wrestling, until they accidently splintered the door frame. O-Yari beat on the iron pot with his spear while Kenyuki pounded on the porch with his fists. They yelled and roared and bellowed until Kenyuki's ears were quite sore.

"That was fun," said O-Yari, "I wish we could do that again sometime. *Sayonara*." And then, as silent as the turning of the tide, he was gone.

Late that night, Kenyuki posted a second notice on the town's gate. His large feet went *patta, patta, patta* in the darkness. The dogs barked and snarled at the sound, but the ogre couldn't hear any farmer coming out to investigate. As quietly as he could, Kenyuki returned to his home and waited for the villagers to gather at dawn.

"Alas!" the village headman said. "Now he wants the whole village to come."

"Perhaps what he said is true," an old voice said. "We have all returned safely, although with bruises and scrapes. How else would we have escaped the blue oni if the red one hadn't intervened?"

"If it is our fate to end up in Kenyuki's belly," said the smith, "then that's what will happen. But let us all go together, and at least we will give him a battle."

Kenyuki could hear the women preparing the best festival clothing. But he could also hear the men sharpening axes, sickles and pruning hooks.

Kenyuki had a feast laid out, even greater that the day before, by the time the villagers arrived. The headman knelt in front of the house, and touched his head to the ground. "We are here, as you requested," he said briskly.

Kenyuki bowed in response. "I am overjoyed. You do me a great honor." The ogre could see that each man held some tool or other, all of which looked

Artwork by Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk

very sharp. He smiled at a small girl who nervously held onto her mother's *obi*. But while one hand held onto the sash, he noticed, the other was trying to hide a kitchen knife.

They have come to a feast prepared for a fight, Kenyuki thought. How impolite! But I must try to say something allow them to save face. "I am grateful that you brought so many tools," said Kenyuki. "I was going to enlarge my garden this year. But I was thinking it is still too early for that. Come, let us eat." The ogre served them all, from the headman down to the lowliest laborer. After the *sake* was served, they all found themselves joking and laughing.

Kenyuki went back into his house and returned with the three-stringed *samisen* and a *shakuhachi* flute. The village musicians set aside their old battered instruments and took up the gifts. Other treasures he brought out besides, so that even the smallest child had some precious item to take home. The village's musicians struck up a tune, and soon the whole village was dancing in a circle around the musicians.

How much better they sound with their new instruments, Kenyuki thought. He joined in the dance as well, with a delicate fan in one huge hand. He danced poorly, but nobody was so impolite to comment. As the sun set, Kenyuki hung rice paper lanterns out on the pine trees around his house. Finally, the villagers all returned home, tired, full, and grateful not to have been eaten.

The next morning, Kenyuki cheerfully cleaned up the remains of the party. "I must go to the next mountain and tell O-Yari how well things went," he said to himself, "and to thank him for playing his part in my plan."

Taking his walking staff, taller than any house in the village, he set out. After walking all day, he reached the house of O-Yari. "*Kon nichi wa*," Kenyuki called out in greeting. But no sound came out of the house. A gust of wind blew through the clearing. Kenyuki could hear the scrape, scrape of paper on wood. He approached the house. Attached to the door post was a note.

"Kenyuki," O-Yari's note read, "As your friend, I will do whatever I can to make you happy. I must go now. If the villagers find out about our trick and know that we are good friends, they will never trust you again. For the sake of our friendship, I can never see you again. Good luck, enjoy your new friends and the music. *Sayonara*."

Kenyuki dabbed at his moist eyes, and turned toward the village where he could hear music. "*Sayonara*, old friend," Kenyuki said.

❄

A. E. Roberts received a degree in International Affairs from Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon, and a second degree in Computer Information Sciences from the University of Oregon in Eugene. He currently lives with two cats, a dog, an assortment of tropical fish, and a criminal defense attorney. This is his first professional fiction sale.

Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk has been working as a professional artist for over 15 years. She is a two-time recipient of the Canadian Aurora Award for Artistic Achievement. Her artwork has appeared in numerous publications and is now included on the CD-ROM "Atlantis to the Stars".

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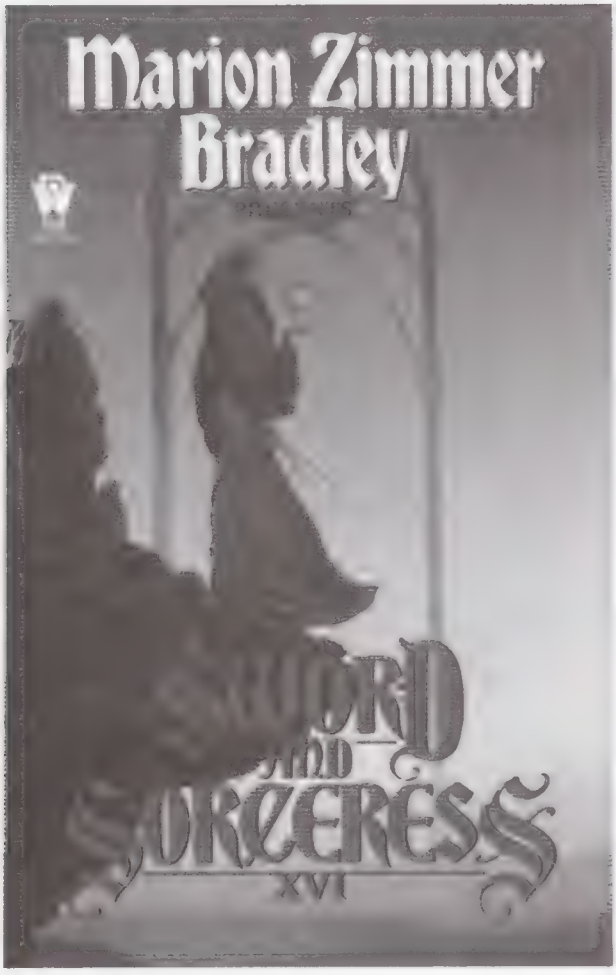

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WRITERS TALK BACK:

Why Bookstores Do — and Should — Exist

by Lawrence Schimel

The other night I had dinner with a fellow writer who complained that he had walked into a local bookstore and asked for a new book that had been out for a few weeks, which he'd just read a review of. The clerk checked the computer and informed my friend that they didn't have the book in stock, but they'd be happy to order for him.

"I can order it myself from Amazon.com for cheaper than you'd charge me," my friend told the clerk before walking out, "I wanted to look at it now."

My friend's answer surprised me a little. My instinct would've been to check another bookstore, but I live in a city — Manhattan — which has such variety available. I've never ordered anything on-line myself, but I know that I am in a quickly shrinking minority. On-line shopping is the buzz everywhere, especially in the book world. And I couldn't fault my friend's argument — he could order it, and have it shipped directly to his home. Convenience and discount — what could compete with that?

At the same time, I knew that I would never be completely satisfied with this arrangement. I am a bookstore junkie, and I know that I am not alone in this. Certainly many of us — readers and writers both — suffer from the "gentle madness" of bibliophilia.

When I worked in the MZBFM offices a few years ago, I remember well how we would often receive calls from the local book shop in town informing us that Marion had left her cane there again. Marion was just recovering from a stroke, but nothing could deter her from walking into town to browse and buy new books. So excited by the adventures which lay in store in her new purchases, Marion would hurry home without her cane, which one of us would have to retrieve.

I sat down to think of a few reasons why my beloved bookstores do — and should — exist.

1) Immediate Gratification.

This is the primary advantage bookstores offer: easy access to books. If the printed book should unfortunately become obsolete in favor of e-books, bookstores would no longer be able to offer the same convenience as a quick download from a cellular modem satellite link. But right now, when you want a book right now, you can find them at your local bookstore.

2) Comparison Shopping. Also, Browsing.

Some shoppers don't know what they want. They may know they like a certain type of book and browse a genre, looking for titles that catch their interest. They may know some authors whose books they'd liked but not know what these authors have published lately — or years ago. They may trust simply in serendipity.

One of the joys of my undergraduate years was getting to wander the open stacks of my University library. More often than not, the book that became the key for a paper I was writing was not the one I'd gone looking for but a related one that had been on the same shelf which, because of how it was coded, hadn't come up in my card catalog search.

Now, in Manhattan, using the library on 42nd Street with its famous twin lions flanking the entrance steps, you have to laboriously request each book individually, while library staff retrieves them for you. This requires you to know in advance exactly what you want. There is no serendipity, like what I found in the open-stacks of my University library — or what I find still wandering the aisles of bookstores.

3) Expertise.

When I worked at Books of Wonder, a children's book shop in Manhattan, customers would often request books by age and interest — "I need a book for a five-year-old boy who likes trucks" — as they bought gifts for relatives or the children of friends they might not know well.

I remain impressed that my first day on the job, the then manager of the store, Schuyler Hooke, made me sit down with a stack of the best new picture books and a pile of classics and made me read. Later, I was shown how to use the register, how to receive books or fulfill mail-order requests, and all the other myriad minutiae of running a book shop. But when I hit the sales floor the next day and customers asked for suggestions, I had a working knowledge of recent staff favorites and classics to rely on.

Admittedly, not all bookstores operate this way, or value expertise so highly; this is more common in specialty book shops. But ideally all bookstores, including general ones, can (and some do) function this way.

4) Hard-to-Get Titles

One of the advantages of good bookstores — and specialty bookstores in particular — is the availability of hard-to-find

items, by which I mean books from independent and smaller presses and not, as in the case of my friend which opens this essay, newly published books from commercial houses. Especially since many smaller press books have a higher pricepoint than their more commercial brethren, these are titles which a customer may wish to browse before making the decision to purchase.

And some small press items, especially within our genre, are not available from the on-line vendors. Admittedly, these special limited editions or high quality hand printing are often not found in your general bookstore, but are the kinds of things which specialty bookstores like to carry, for their dedicated clientele.

These days, what counts as a hard-to-get title may be an author's backlist. Because so much emphasis is placed on new front-list books, the first few titles in a series — especially if by a newer author — may no longer be readily available in a chain bookstore. This is where competently-run independent book shops and specialty bookstores can be such a boon, if they make sure to reorder the older titles in a series when a new volume appears.

So, what do all these reasons mean? Are bookstores here to stay or will they go the way of the dinosaur — or the unicorn — and disappear into myth?

A lot depends on how you, the reader, make your book purchasing decisions, to buy on-line or in the real world, and whether you patronize independent stores or the vast conglomerates that are the chains. While I personally advocate supporting the independent stores, which win my allegiance because they usually champion the good reads and underdogs and not simply the bestsellers that pay the rent, as a writer, I can't complain with anyplace you choose to buy books.

But I know, too, that if bookstores were to disappear, I will feel a profound ache and emptiness within my soul, knowing that a type of magic has disappeared from the world. ❄

EDITED BY DEBBIE NOTKIN AND THE SECRET FEMINIST CABAL

Flying Cups and Saucers:
Gender Explorations in Science Fiction & Fantasy

EVER WONDER WHAT HAPPENED to the rest of the tea party when the saucers went off into space? Here's your chance to find out!

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THE LAST WORD

I'm off to Spokane for WesterCon in the morning (though of course by the time you read this, I'll be back in the office). I helped at a writers' workshop at WisCon, and I'll be doing a manuscript preparation workshop for two hours at WesterCon. As I gathered up my handouts for the workshop, I realized that this magazine has published a **lot** of articles for writers, from Marion's first column on turning pro to Heather Jones's classic column on speaking forsoothly, to Ann Sharp's delightful Q&A in this issue. A full list of topics should appear soon on our website, which should make it easier to locate appropriate back issues. After that, I think it's time to collect some of the better columns into a book.

Incidentally, we have less than 150 of the beautiful green hardcover anthologies, "Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY WORLDS". This book will never — we can guarantee it — be in your local bookstore. So check the ad on the back cover and order your own copy before they're all gone.

The house-rebuilding continues, making us crazy and filling the office with dust and noise. Marion and her household are living in alternate quarters, and she recently celebrated her sixty-ninth and the magazine's eleventh birthday with a small family party. Her talented daughter Moira entertained us with her harp and voice, and Moira's two beautiful children — I'm not related to them, so you can actually believe it — impressed us with their composure.

I've written a sidebar on punctuation for dialogue, since this is an area where many incoming manuscripts need some assistance.

— *Rachel E. Holmen*

❄

Punctuation for Dialogue

Improper punctuation for dialogue* is surprisingly common in manuscripts. Let's look at a sample manuscript pages which contain conversations between characters:

"John, help! I've fallen into a well! Bring a rope," said Roberta.

John replied, "I'm on my way." He ran to the barn and grabbed a coil of rope hanging on a rack.

"My hand is slipping. Can you get here faster?" pleaded the falling woman. "I don't know how much longer I can hold on.

"I think there's a rope by the barn. Did you find it?" she continued, her voice rising anxiously.

Dialogue isn't very tricky, but it does have several formal rules.

1) Start a new paragraph every time the speaker changes.

2) In most sentences, dialogue is set off from the rest of the sentence by a comma. If the speaker is indicated first, follow that with a comma and then the open-quote mark. Otherwise, the last sentence or partial sentence of dialogue ends in a comma and a close-quote, and then the speaker is indicated.

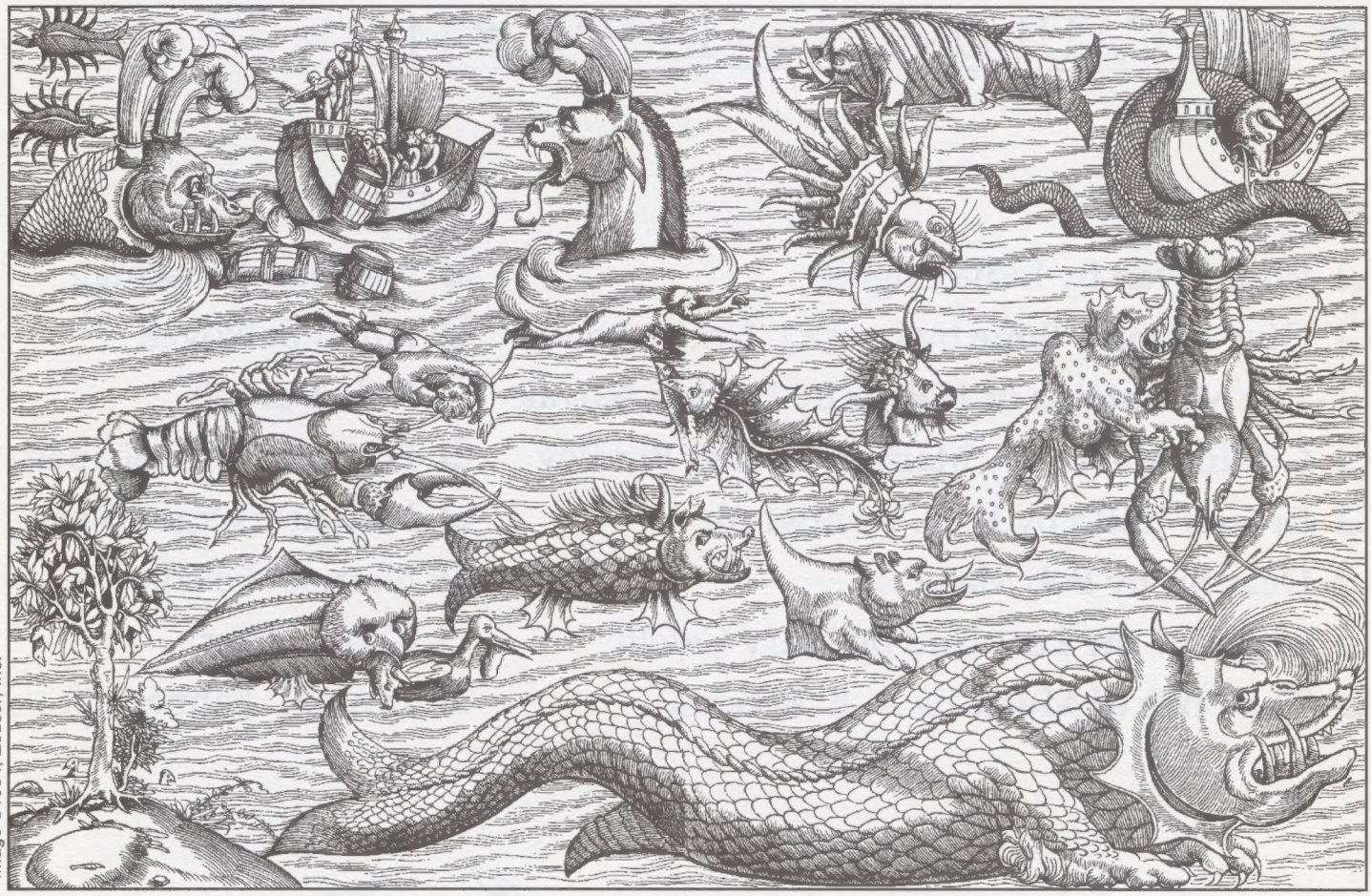
3) If the dialogue ends in a question mark or exclamation point, use this punctuation and then type close-quotes. Even if the sentence continues, don't use a comma after the question mark or exclamation point. (Note that sentences containing phrases such as "I wonder how" are not usually questions, they are statements.)

4) If the dialogue continues for more than a paragraph, the start of each new paragraph has an open-quote. However, don't use a close-quote until the dialogue actually ends.

— *Rachel E. Holmen*

❄

*The American Heritage Dictionary lists "dialog" as being a variant of "dialogue". So I'll stick with the longer version.



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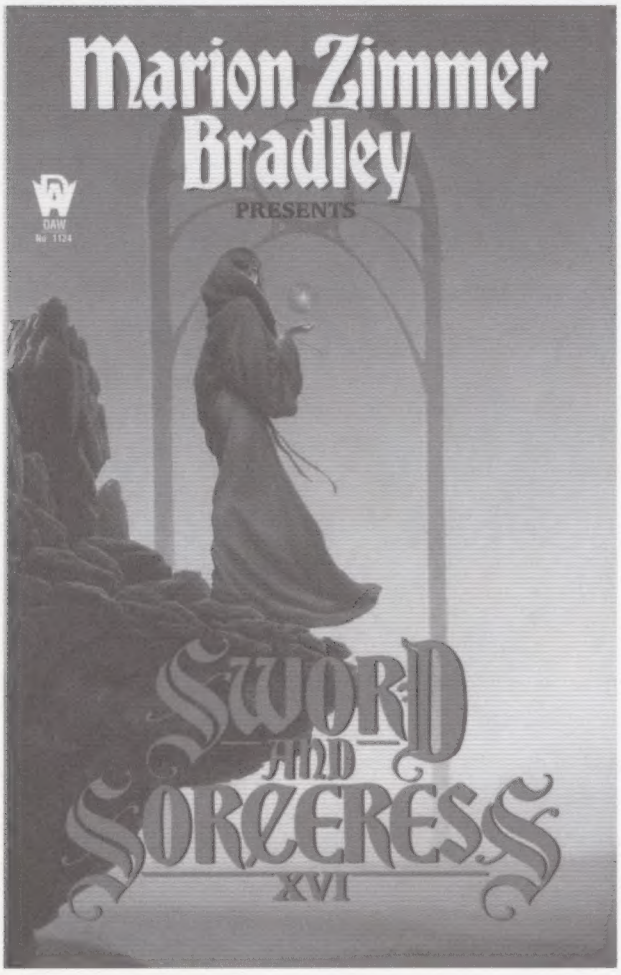

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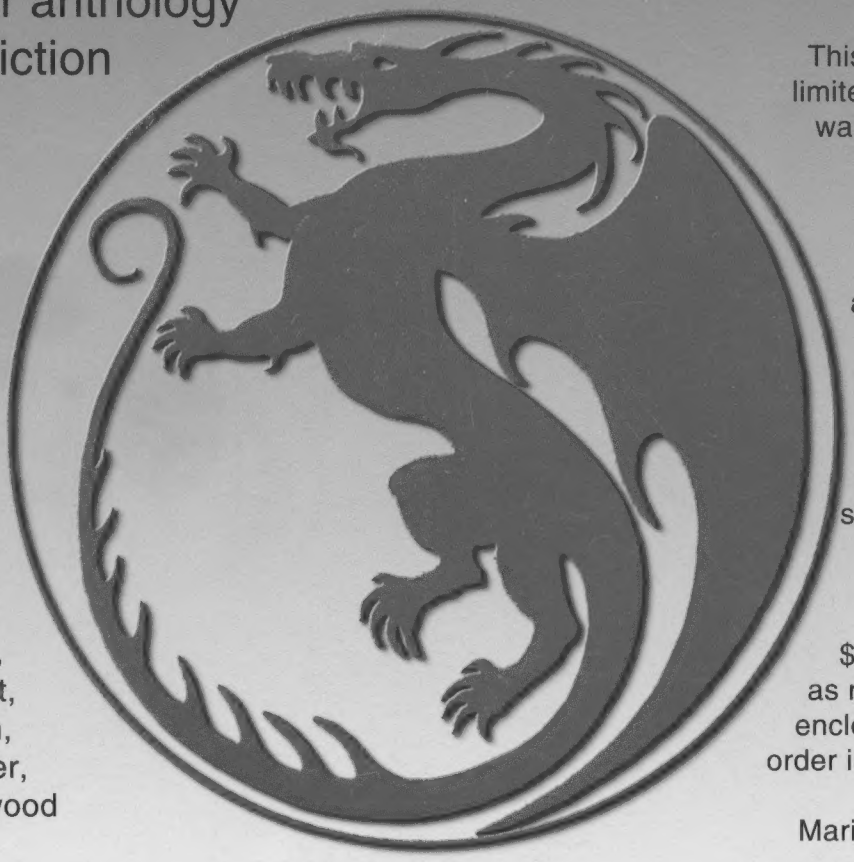

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